



TENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Evaluation of the InFocus Programme on Skills, Knowledge and Employability

1. Introduction and background

1. The evaluation of the InFocus Programme on Skills, Knowledge and Employability (IFP/SKILLS) followed the ILO evaluation framework (GB.285/PFA/10, November 2002).
2. The evaluation was conducted under the responsibility of the Bureau for Programming and Management with the participation of two outside experts and two ILO officials. Factual information was collected, documentation and evaluation reports reviewed, and interviews carried out with all Professional and some General Service staff of IFP/SKILLS, as well as with ILO staff outside the Programme. A questionnaire was sent to training specialists in field offices.
3. Pekka Aro, Director of IFP/SKILLS, tragically passed away on 6 April 2003 while on official duty. He dedicated all his energy to consolidating IFP/SKILLS, entrusted to him in February 2001. This exceptional circumstance shocked the ILO and dramatically affected the Programme.
4. IFP/SKILLS was established in 1999 as part of a major reorganization of the ILO that introduced four main sectors and InFocus programmes. IFP/SKILLS is placed in the employment sector and builds on a long tradition of ILO work in the field of training, vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons, and employment services.
5. IFP/SKILLS defines the Programme's purpose as follows:

IFP/SKILLS seeks to promote greater investment in skills and training so that men and women have enhanced and equal access to productive and decent work. Through the vehicles of advocacy, knowledge development and services to ILO constituents, IFP/SKILLS promotes the improvement of training policies and programmes worldwide, with special emphasis on training strategies that support the integration of groups that may be disadvantaged in the labour market (source: www.ilo.org/english/employment/skills/index.htm).

6. IFP/SKILLS is organized into three main subgroups, namely training policies and programmes, equity issues addressing the training and employability of disabled persons, youth and older workers, and technical cooperation and employment services.

2. Main findings

7. This section highlights the main findings of the evaluation.

A highly relevant programme

8. The ILO is endowed with a strong mandate in the training field, a long tradition of work and huge demand in relation to globalization, productivity, poverty alleviation and social integration. Youth and adults, women and men, including disabled persons, in all countries, are confronted with training for skills. IFP/SKILLS has responded to these challenges and realized major achievements since 1999.
9. Among these are the adoption of a new Recommendation on human resources development and training by the International Labour Conference in 2004, as well as the materials prepared in its wake, namely the report on “Learning and training for work in the knowledge society”, 2003 and the web site (http://www.logos-net.net/ilo/150_base/index.htm) dedicated to training policies in member States; the code of practice on managing disability at the workplace, 2001, now available in 20 languages; the ILO contribution to the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing, 2002 on work and older persons; recognized competence on the management of vocational training systems; the *Public employment service in a changing labour market*, 2001, available in some ten languages; genuine contributions through technical cooperation projects; and a host of conferences, seminars and knowledge networks.

A weakly integrated programme

10. The organization of IFP/SKILLS, the distribution of tasks, the items produced, the views of many of the staff, all suggest a situation lacking integration. The three main subunits are each headed by a manager reporting to the Director who reports to the Executive Director of the Sector. The size of subunits ranges from two to five Professional staff (table 1 in the Appendix).
11. The history of IFP/SKILLS partly explains the fragmentation observed. First, when established in late 1999, IFP/SKILLS drew staff from a former training policies branch and other units to which were subsequently added a unit on employment services and on technical cooperation. The amalgamation of units and persons encountered difficulty meshing into a coherent whole, as it strived to adapt to much lower resources. In the early 1990s, training was a sizeable programme with four branches, and regular and extra-budgetary resources much larger than today (for instance, some 42 Professional staff worked in the training programme at headquarters in 1990-91 compared to 16 in 2002-03).
12. Second, IFP/SKILLS lived through a difficult management history. Between late 1999 and February 2001, the Programme was reporting to an officer-in-charge who was fully absorbed by another full-time assignment. Between February 2001 and April 2003, a Director was formally managing the Programme. A new officer-in-charge was designated until May 2004 when a Director was formally appointed. Between late 1999 and May 2004, for various reasons, the Programme was formally managed by a full-time Director for only two years.
13. Third, several organizational changes in a context of uncertainty added to a high workload. By the end of 2001 the three subunits were formally established. But these were affected by, fourthly, a very high turnover of staff, a consequence and cause of the above. Between

2000 and 2003, 18 Professional staff left IFP/SKILLS on various grounds (retirements, voluntary transfers and departures, counting all sources of funding), while eight joined.

A dispersed programme of work

- 14.** Work items and themes of IFP/SKILLS over the period 2000-03 have been influenced as much by past work and areas of expertise as by requests formulated by ILO conferences and meetings. The high number of work items is striking. For instance, the 2002-03 work plan of IFP/SKILLS lists 22 major items and 54 work items. This is equivalent to four work items per Professional staff per biennium (table 2). Table 3 lists four main sources influencing the IFP/SKILLS work programme.
- 15.** In its conclusions on human resources training and development, the International Labour Conference (88th Session, June 2000) identified eight broad areas to be addressed in a revised instrument. The Conference specifically requested databases on best practices in national qualification frameworks and on national expenditures in vocational and continuing training. In reporting to the Governing Body (March 2001) on the effect given to the International Labour Conference conclusions, the Office listed six areas in which work was ongoing. The Global Employment Forum of November 2001 identified five major policy challenges to be addressed by the ILO.
- 16.** This prompts three observations. First, the Office acted on requests made by the Conference. Second, the Programme chose to add without reducing work items. This inevitably led to overload as evidenced by the 22 major work items of 2002-03. This conclusion is valid in spite of the fact that one item, ageing, migrated away, and work on youth only recovered in 2004. Third, questions can be raised regarding the focus and balance of thematic priorities. Indeed, many of the items found in the 2002-03 work plan reflect debates relevant to higher income countries, such as lifelong learning, high-performance workplaces and national qualifications frameworks, rather than skills in the informal economy and poverty alleviation prevailing in lower income countries. Work is carried out in all these areas, but questions can be raised regarding focus and balance.
- 17.** Such dispersion undermines the capacity of the Programme to achieve maximum efficiency in a limited number of areas in which significant contributions could be achieved.
- 18.** One exception is gender mainstreaming, applied systematically throughout IFP/SKILLS. Detailed information is collected by the gender team monitoring the sensitivity of activities and officials to gender issues. For instance, 43 per cent of all external collaboration contracts were issued to women in 2002. However, such monitoring does not seem to address broader policy issues in relation to training and gender.
- 19.** An additional indication is found in the amount and regional distribution of travel on official duty carried out by Professional staff over the period examined (2000-03), irrespective of the purpose and duration of travel (table 4). The total number of missions amounted to 380, or an average of six missions per year per Professional staff, not unreasonable in an international organization. The geographical distribution is highly skewed towards Europe (East and West) accounting for over 53 per cent of all missions, followed by Africa (19 per cent) and Asia (18 per cent). This is partly explained by the absence of vocational training specialists, the rise of technical cooperation in the Europe and Central Asia regions, and donor consultations held mostly in Europe.
- 20.** Another indication is provided by the 90 titles published by IFP/SKILLS over the period examined, including Conference and seminar reports, working papers and publications for

sale (excluding translations) (table 5). Many of the publications are of high quality, have been well received, and translated into several major and other languages. However, the choice of a large number of publications over a more reduced number can be questioned.

21. It is appropriate to ask whether the resources available to IFP/SKILLS can support such a high number of work themes. By the end of 2003, IFP/SKILLS comprised 16 Professional positions, with an additional eight Professionals in ILO field offices. Total regular budget allocation at headquarters amounted to US\$6.4 million in 2002-03 (in constant 2000-01 dollars), down from US\$6.8 million in 2000-01, a decline of over 6 per cent in constant dollars (table 6). Non-staff resources are equivalent to an average of US\$38,700 per Professional per year. The average expenditure per work item per year in 2002-03 amounts to US\$145,400. While far from negligible, questions can be raised as to the viability of this strategy.

A strategy in search of consolidation

22. The strategy of IFP/SKILLS is guided by the broad operational objective stated in the programme and budget: "ILO constituents invest more in training and skills development to provide men and women improved and equal access to decent jobs."¹
23. The implied strategy is one of influencing policies of ILO constituents in respect of training investments, equality of access and coherence between training and employment policies. This strategy is not fully applied.

Means of action and strategy

24. IFP/SKILLS displays elements of sound sequencing and balancing of different means of action, comprising normative work, policy reviews and comparative analysis, networking and partnerships, and demonstration technical cooperation projects. But there are many examples of work items carried out in isolation, of technical cooperation projects not leading to wider policy advocacy, or of research and meetings not linked to any identifiable policy network and objective. This does not preclude that discrete items may be very successful when viewed separately.
25. Promotion of employment for disabled persons combines standard setting and a code of practice, country legislation reviews, an information and research network on employment and training (Gladnet with Cornell University and including over 800 subscribers), interactions with employers' and workers' organizations and several technical cooperation projects, mostly implemented by disabled persons' organizations. Training remains an important means to secure employment and social integration of disabled persons, also pursued through other means (for instance, anti-discriminatory measures) requiring strong Office-wide collaboration. Resource constraints have limited further work on ageing and on youth.
26. IFP/SKILLS has invested considerable time and resources in developing the new Recommendation concerning human resources development and training. This was upheld by close interaction with constituents and led to a series of useful products found on the dedicated web site (http://www.logos-net.net/ilo/150_base/index.htm) describing over 500 national policy initiatives. Regional workshops (organized with the Inter-American Research and Documentation Centre on Vocational Training (CINTERFOR) in Latin America) enabled the Programme to disseminate innovative policy reforms and

¹ Programme and Budget for the biennium 2004-05, ILO, Geneva, pg. 53.

international best practice. Comprehensive policy reviews and comparative analysis of training policies are only incipient (together with UNESCO and the Asia-Pacific Skills Development Programme (APSDEP)), although this is an area of strong interest on the part of constituents.

27. Very close working relationships have been established with the World Association of Public Employment Services and the Confédération internationale des entreprises de travail temporaire (the International Confederation of Temporary Work Enterprises). Technical assistance is carried out on request, even through a limited number of national projects. Joint efforts on employment services for disabled persons have opened a new and well received area of work. Work on employment services could benefit from greater interaction and possibly integration with work on labour market policies.
28. The technical cooperation unit has been strengthened since 2002 and considerably streamlined its operations. Nevertheless, it appears to operate in relative isolation, including from technical cooperation carried out elsewhere in the Programme. As a result, the desirable combination of means of action appears weak, particularly in areas of concern to poor countries that benefit relatively more from ILO technical cooperation than from policy analysis and comparative reviews.

Technical cooperation as a policy instrument

29. Taken individually, many IFP/SKILLS technical cooperation projects are quite successful, such as for instance the training of informal sector artisans in Niger, projects for disabled persons in Cambodia and Ethiopia, and support to employment services counselling and training in Kosovo and Ukraine. But many can also be seen as ends in themselves, if only by virtue of size. Questions remain on the extent to which technical cooperation projects are combined with other means of action in order to achieve a broader objective of influencing government and donor policy on training.
30. Approximately US\$12 million were expended in 2000-01, and in 2002-03 over 325 technical cooperation projects including all projects implemented directly by IFP/SKILLS or through skills specialists in external offices (table 8). This gives an average expenditure of US\$18,422 per project per year. Only nine projects exceeded a budget of US\$500,000. Again, questions of excessive dispersion can be raised, since administrative costs per project are similar. The regional distribution of expenditure varies from a low 14 per cent in Asia to 22 per cent in Africa.
31. In nominal terms, technical cooperation expenditure declined by 3.6 per cent between 2000-01 and 2002-03. Regional trends show a marked contrast between a steep fall in Africa and the Americas and an equally steep increase in Asia and Europe. During the same period, total ILO technical cooperation (nominal) expenditure increased by some 23 per cent. The decline for IFP/SKILLS is therefore specific.
32. This may reflect donor preferences away from training. The share of vocational education and training in total International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) lending declined from 30 per cent in the 1980s to 11 per cent in the 1990s, but this still amounted to some US\$1.5 billion in 2000. Indeed, in 1992-93 the ILO expended US\$41.5 million in technical cooperation for training.
33. ILO skills project proposals may be insufficiently attractive, although one recent proposal in the Philippines and Pakistan won a competitive bidding, and one donor extended funding to a project in Ethiopia.

Measurement of performance can be improved

34. Information on programme implementation is summarized in table 7. The outcomes are captured as the number of countries in which some change has been observed, a crude but common indicator in the Office. Although targets (number of countries) have consistently been exceeded, questions can be raised, in view of the very broad statement of the objective, as to the nature of the change recorded in the countries listed. In particular, have the different means of action available to the Programme been combined in ways so as to effectively achieve the stated objective? There is scope in the ILO generally and in IFP/SKILLS specifically to revisit the formulation of indicators in order to better measure actual performance.

Wider use of social dialogue

35. Governments, employers and workers have a strong shared interest in training. This is reflected in the close tripartite consultations observed in the preparation of the new Recommendation on human resources. Logically, IFP/SKILLS cooperated closely with ACTRAV, ACT/EMP and constituents in developing this instrument.
36. Further cooperation with employers and workers was developed on specific issues, such as youth employment. A working paper on disadvantaged youth was drafted together with ACTRAV, as well as a guide for employers on “Meeting the youth employment challenges”, published with ACT/EMP. A close partnership with employers’ organizations was developed on disabled people. There is active participation of the social partners in a number of technical cooperation projects, such as in Kosovo.
37. However, the situation in IFP/SKILLS during the period reviewed has not allowed the full development of such cooperation. The new Human Resources Development Recommendation (No. 195), 2004 should provide the opportunity for a further strengthening of social dialogue and tripartism.

External partnerships

38. A joint working group on technical and vocational education and training was formed with UNESCO, which led to a series of activities. Collaboration with OECD centred on lifelong learning and national qualifications frameworks and with the European Union on recognition of prior learning. IFP/SKILLS is an active member of the Working Group for International Cooperation on Skills Development, through which key partnerships with donors have evolved. Solid partnerships have been forged with international NGOs and disabled persons’ organizations, and in employment services. Working relationships have developed with EUROSTAT and the European Training Foundation in several fields. Efforts to influence World Bank policy viewing persons with disability as welfare recipients rather than as employment seekers have been persistent. These initiatives are welcome but require further consolidation.

Internal partnerships

39. The troubled management history of IFP/SKILLS has affected the development of stable internal partnerships. There is evidence of active working relationships with a number of units, particularly international labour standards and social dialogue. Likewise different degrees of exchanges and cooperation have evolved with CINTERFOR, strengthened since

2001, the Turin Centre and APSDEP. But there remains ample scope to further develop such collaboration.

40. There are signs of close working relationships with field offices, particularly through vocational training specialists in ILO multidisciplinary teams, where these exist, often facilitated by prior field assignments of senior IFP/SKILLS staff. Nevertheless, working relationships seem below potential for specific and more general reasons. First, the regional distribution of vocational training specialists (none in sub-Saharan Africa) is skewed (table 1). Technical cooperation projects in Africa are mostly implemented from headquarters. Second, IFP/SKILLS has had to concentrate on priorities set by the International Labour Conference. Lastly, as elsewhere in the ILO, there is some confusion on roles and responsibilities of centralized and decentralized technical cooperation projects, weakening the development of technical cooperation.

3. Recommendations

41. Five main recommendations derive from the findings of the evaluation:

- (i) IFP/SKILLS should consider refocusing its Programme on a limited number of priority themes in which it has a clear mandate and comparative advantage and the capacity, in keeping with its human and financial resources, to achieve decisive influence on the principal actors in the broad field of training policies. This should apply to substantive priorities and to means of action. In view of the time-bound nature of InFocus programmes, the direction suggested here should lead to making skills, knowledge and employability a regular ILO programme.
- (ii) The overall aim of IFP/SKILLS should be to influence the policies and decisions of ILO constituents and institutions working with them, in particular donors, policy-making forums, international financial institutions and regional banks. Means of action available to IFP/SKILLS should be so combined as to achieve the objective of wide support of the above institutions to ILO policies. Two areas merit particular attention: raising the capacity of training policy-makers and managers among constituents in member States; and a proactive strategy to mobilize resources for technical cooperation through the building of strategic alliances with donors and financial institutions with a view to influencing their policies.
- (iii) IFP/SKILLS should consider rebalancing the distribution of resources across thematic priorities providing broadly equal shares to new developments in training policies and systems; skills and poverty reduction in the informal economy with a strong focus on employability of youth; and management and reform of training policies and systems. Work in these three areas should build on the comparative advantage of IFP/SKILLS recognizing the necessary consistency between training and skills policies and economic, social and labour market policies, as well as international labour standards and the role of social dialogue and tripartism therein. In short, the ILO seems particularly well positioned to review, analyse and disseminate best practice on training and employment in all member States, as underscored consistently by the International Labour Conference.
- (iv) Implicit in the above is a further consolidation of cooperation with governments, employers' and workers' organizations in developing ILO policy and programmes on training.

- (v) IFP/SKILLS should revise its strategic framework outcomes and indicators so as to permit genuine performance monitoring and measurement, in line with the above recommendations.

Comments from IFP/SKILLS on the evaluation

- 42. The Skills, Knowledge and Employability Department welcomes this evaluation and wishes at the outset to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the late Pekka Aro to the IFP/SKILLS Programme and its staff.
- 43. The Department endorses the five recommendations of the evaluation and is already using its findings to guide the readjustment and refinement of its work in the context of continuously improving our services and support to ILO constituents.
- 44. Staff of the Department have jointly analysed and discussed the recommendations. The opportunity to refresh and renew our commitment to the Decent Work Agenda and our focus on influencing the decisions of policy-makers has been positive.
- 45. All work items are being reviewed for current relevancy and with the intent of strengthening our strategic use of every means of action to influence and support government policy-makers, from knowledge generation to technical cooperation demonstration projects and programmes. Improved working relationships with employers' and workers' organizations are being developed to ensure maximum involvement of the social partners, and increased partnership and leveraging of their networks and resources.
- 46. As a first step towards implementing the recommendations, the Department is hosting in November 2004 a meeting of field specialists and headquarters staff to better target limited resources among a small number of well-defined priority themes, including skills and employability for poverty reduction in the informal economy, with special emphasis on youth employability, and high-quality support for the reform of training policies and systems. A focus on equity for men and women and the disadvantaged is a priority. Building more formal links with field specialists, including CINTERFOR and the APSDEP for example, at the national and regional levels will support improved identification of needs of member States and stronger links to local donor partners. It is hoped that the complement of field specialists will increase in regions where today there are none, in sub-Saharan Africa for example, or too few for adequate support.
- 47. *The Committee may wish to recommend to the Governing Body that it requests the Director-General to take into consideration the above findings and recommendations, together with the deliberations of the Committee, in the further implementation of the Skills, Knowledge and Employability Programme.*

Geneva, 30 September 2004.

Point for decision: Paragraph 47.

Appendix

Table 1. Staffing in IFP/SKILLS

All sources of fund	P staff	Vocational training specialists in regions	
Training policies	5		
Equity	2	Arab States	1
Technical cooperation	5	Americas	2
Employment services	2	Africa	1
Departmental management	1	Asia	3 (1 = 50%)
Director	<u>1</u>	Total	7
Total	16		
(Regular budget positions)	14		

Table 2. Workplan and items in 2002-03

Major items	Number of sub-items
Revision of R.150	3
Investment	4
Policy reform	4
Lifelong learning	3
Skills for poor	7
Strategic alliances	6
Employment services	1
LMIS (Labour Market Information Systems)	1
Technical cooperation	2
Delivery systems	3
Skills recognition/National Qualification Frameworks (NQF)	3
Core skills	3
TC skills recognition	3
Learning enterprises	2
Code of practice	1
Awareness campaign	1
Disability-friendly workplace	1
Labour market transitions	1
Skills, poverty and gender	1
African decade disability	1
Ageing	2
Skills and PRSP	<u>1</u>
Total	54

Table 3. Thematic priorities

ILC conclusions 2000	Global Employment Conference 2001	Report to the March 2001 Governing Body	Skills workplan 2002-03
Vocation, education & training (VET) expenditures database	Investment in training and education	Revision of R.150	Revision of R.150
NQF database	Basic education, literacy and core skills	VET expenditures database	Investment
Revision R.150	Reforming vocational VET systems	NQF database	Policy reform
Training and education needs	Qualification frameworks	Social dialogue on training	Lifelong learning
Training and decent work	Social dialogue on training	Training and ICT	Skills for poor
Lifelong learning		HRD and socio-economic policies	Strategic alliances
Investment in training			Employment services
Qualifications frameworks			LMIS
Equity of opportunity			Technical cooperation
Social dialogue			Delivery systems
Technical assistance			Skills recognition/NQF
			Core skills
			TC skills recognition
			Learning enterprises
			Code of practice
			Awareness campaign
			Disability-friendly workplace
			Labour market transitions
			Skills, poverty and gender
			African decade disability
			Ageing
			Skills and PRSP

Table 4. Travel on official duty over a four-year period (2000-03)

By destination	Distribution (%)
Africa	19.2
Americas	9.2
Asia	18.2
Europe (East and West, excluding missions to Turin)	53.4
Total	100
Total number of missions	380

Note: Average number of missions by P staff per year = 6.0

Table 5. Publications (all forms)

		2000-01	2002-03
Equity	Employment/disability	4	20
	Ageing		6
	Youth	9	
Employment services		4	4
Training policies	Revision of R.150	1	6
	Investment		3
	Informal economy		15
	Policy reform	1	2
	Lifelong learning	2	2
	Core skills		1
	Homework	3	
	Workplace learning		4
Technical cooperation		1	2
Total		25	65

Table 6. IFP/SKILLS – Regular Budget

Allocation basis (in constant 2000-01 dollars)	2000-01	2002-03	% change
Staff	5 402 704	5 355 072	-0.9
Non-staff	1 434 480	1 041 670	-27.4
Total	6 837 184	6 396 742	-6.4

Table 7. Implementation report

2000-01	Target	Outcome	2002-03	Target	Outcome
ILO constituents that adopt strategies to improve the quality, equity and effectiveness of human resources development and training and to increase investment in skills, knowledge and employability (2b1)	Constituents in 8 member States	22 member States	ILO constituents that adopt policies and invest in improvements in the quality and effectiveness of skills development and training and employment services (2b1)	Constituents in 15 member States	Constituents in 20 member States
Approvals and delivery of extra-budgetary technical cooperation on training and human resource development	US\$3 million in new approvals; expenditure of 60 per cent of allocations	US\$3.5 million in new approvals, expenditure reaches 61 per cent of allocations	ILO constituents that adopt strategies to ensure that women in general, and persons with special needs, such as disabled, displaced and young and older workers, have access to training and skills development (2b2)	15 member States	16 member States

Source: ILO Implementation reports.

Table 8. Technical cooperation expenditure

All projects HQ and field offices	2000-01	2002-03	Total	Regional distribution	% change
Africa	4 241 770	1 130 677	5 372 447	22.4	-73.3
Americas	2 165 805	1 722 811	3 888 616	16.2	-20.5
Arab States	1 663 403	1 990 632	3 654 035	15.3	19.7
Asia	1 187 627	2 206 821	3 394 448	14.2	85.8
Europe	1 793 262	3 318 601	5 111 863	21.3	85.1
Interregional	1 143 902	1 383 268	2 527 170	10.6	20.9
Total	12 195 769	11 752 810	23 948 579	100.0	-3.6