Agenda Setting in Global Policy Development:
The Case of the International Labour Organization
Decent Work Agenda

by

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Dalla Lana School of Public Health
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Structural inequality, employment insecurity, and unhealthy working conditions continue to rise. Confronted by these challenges, global institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) are providing policy advice to protect and promote the health and well-being of workers. This dissertation focuses on agenda setting – how health and social problems get and stay on policy agendas and how agendas are set and produced through the political interactions of social actors – to better understand why global progress in improving poor working conditions through policy may be stalled. I conducted a qualitative study using data from interviews and publicly accessible archival policy texts about the Decent Work Agenda (DWA) and related texts. Interviews with 16 participants from the ILO, World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank (WB) helped to further understand what role the DWA has played in setting these institutions’ work policy agendas. A critical discourse analysis of 10 policy texts surfaced different health, economic, and social conceptualizations of ‘decent work’ in the work policy agendas of these institutions. My findings indicate that the DWA has not been fully embraced by the WHO and WB, although there is evidence of policy coherence within the UN multi-lateral system. I found evidence of resistance to “ILO language” by the WB and shift in ILO language from decent work to job over time (1999-2012). I observed a drift towards privileging macro-economic measures to foster job creation particularly in WB texts but also evidence of strategic
appeals to economic interests in WHO texts. Deeply-held beliefs of neoliberalism that are embedded in global policy enabled pro-market and pro-economic discourses in the case of all three institutions. I found that catalytic events such as the 2008-09 economic crisis and policy precedents contributed positively to attention to and use of the Decent Work Agenda as a policy instrument. I also found differences in the implicit and explicit use of terms such as decent work, health, health equity and economics within and across policy texts. How these concepts come to be interpreted differently in policy texts and contested globally in the face of vested institutional interests partially explains why efforts to improve global working conditions have been stalled.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

My dissertation explores the role of agenda setting at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in order to better understand why global progress in improving poor working conditions through policy may be limited. Research on agenda setting provides a way to examine how health and social problems get and stay on policy agendas, how agendas are set and produced through the political interactions of social actors, which actors get issues on the agenda, and how these actors come to have this capacity.\(^1\)\(^2\) Most agenda setting studies to date have examined the effects of global institutional policy on national and sub-national policy efforts.\(^2\) With the recent financial crisis of 2008-2009, scholars have called for greater examination of the value added role of global institutions.\(^3\) The Lancet—University of Oslo Commission on Global Governance for Health further argues that health inequities could be reduced by improving how global governance works – that is by influencing among global institutions “the distribution of economic, intellectual, normative, and political resources”.\(^4\) An effort to effectively address health inequities requires in part an understanding of the related power asymmetries and global social norms that shape the role and capacity of these actors and constrain their actions relevant to the improvement of working and living conditions.\(^4\) In the case of decent work, questions remain as to why policy responses and other actions taken individually and collectively by global institutions have been declared by some scholars as a “global failure to address poor working conditions”.\(^5\)\(^6\) To shed light on this limited progress, my research focuses on how work policy agendas are discursively defined and shaped, and how competing global institutional interests intersect to advance or thwart the promotion of decent working conditions for all in the global arena.

I selected the ILO Decent Work Agenda as a global policy case example to address this knowledge gap. I designed a qualitative study to deepen our understanding of the Decent Work
Agenda’s role in setting the work policy agendas of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank; and to systematically examine the concepts, assumptions and claims used in policy texts about decent work. Through this dissertation, I was interested in the “agenda setting potential” of the Decent Work Agenda to determine its role in raising the global floor of social protection for all workers through the promotion of just global policies.

My research should be of interest to global institutions, policy makers and researchers involved in global health, labour and/or work and health policy. My findings point to explanatory agenda setting mechanisms at play and to competing and reinforcing discourses that frame different interpretations of decent work, which may ultimately have implications for social, labour and health policies globally (and nationally) that stem from them.

1.2 Background/context

1.2.1 Decent Work

There is a well-established relationship in the literature confirming that “[the] conditions under which people labour have a direct impact on their health”. Much of the relevant research has focused on understanding the associations and causal connections between biological pathways and the social and environmental conditions that produce ill health, injury, disability and death in workers. Work that is not decent has significant health consequences through material and social deprivation and unsafe working conditions. More than 80% of the world’s population do not have sufficient social protection schemes to guarantee income security and access to essential social services. In 2012, global unemployment rose to 197.3 million, which was 28.4 million higher than in 2007. Of those who work, 27% (854 million people) try to live on less than US$2 per day. In contrast, decent work is described as fair, safe, healthy and financially secure, and allows workers to participate in productive ways, while ensuring that they are respected and not discriminated against on the basis of gender, social class, ethnicity or race. Decent work is also
associated with improved health and social outcomes, lower levels of disease and injury, and reduced health and social inequities. The notion of work includes both social and material dimensions. When work is deemed fair, it is proposed that a just relation exists between employers and employees. Other features such as freedom from coercion, job security, fair income, job protection and respect and dignity at work are also present when work is considered fair. These features have both material and social dimensions – income is a material good but the notion of ‘fair income’ introduces a social dimension given its relational nature. Work is therefore a multi-faceted social, economic and health phenomenon, which can be subject to multiple interpretations in the context of the policy development process.

1.2.2 Global institutional context

Global institutions can play a profound role in regulating the global order, and in steering the (re)distribution of goods and services. These institutions are important players in the global governance arena which can shape social norms, values and practices in areas such as work, health and health equity. An analysis of the power and capacity exercised by these actors and their potential influence on each other not only offers insights into the evolution and the struggle for the social regulation of work but can also point to strategies for social change. With the increase in the number of sites of social regulation for work where values and norms are shaped, research is needed more than ever to better understand the hierarchies and tensions between global institutions. These forms of social regulation at a global level are, however, fragile and not well-supported by state level policies. Murray attributes this situation to shifts from “public to private actors and from universal state norms to more particularized norms established by private or less institutionalized actors”. This characterization of the global arena corresponds to what Stone calls a “domain of relative disorder and uncertainty where institutions are underdeveloped and political authority unclear, and dispersed through multiplying institutions and networks.”

In the face of globalization and economic uncertainty, long-standing institutions must redefine themselves while new forms of global health governance continue to gain prominence.
former includes more established global institutions such as the ILO and World Health Organization (WHO) and some non-governmental institutions and work action coalitions, and the latter involve philanthropic, public and private partnerships. Each institution or public/private partnership operates according to the differing norms, ideologies and expectations that govern them. Institutions are usually governed by their missions and constituencies. As the only tripartite UN agency, with government, employer and worker representatives, the ILO promotes social justice, and the realization of human and labour rights for all workers. The rise of public/private partnerships (e.g. Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis) as a preferred tool for global governance for health is also redefining and blurring the boundaries between public and private spheres and creating new forms of authority in the global arena.

The arrival of new actors and emergence of new global regimes (i.e. systems of rule or management) create further challenges. These challenges include the need to establish and reconfirm institutional roles and determine the rules by which different institutions play in the setting of policy agendas. Since the 1980s, for instance, a key development is the growing role of the World Bank in global health policy and in championing an enhanced role for the private sector. The emergence has caused tensions with other global institutions such as the World Health Organization, which must reinvent themselves, or else run the risk of becoming less relevant in a dynamic, highly competitive and fiscally constrained environment where priority-setting and decisions about resource allocation are increasingly politicized and influenced by individual member states. The global arena is a complex political and social space, which is attracting increased attention from scholars. A review conducted by Lee and Kamradt-Scott found three variations in how global health governance was being conceptualized – “the scope of institutional arrangements, strengths and weaknesses of existing institutions and the ideal form and functions of global health governance.” These authors call for greater conceptual clarity in research efforts seeking to better understand the global health governance arena. The decline or revitalization of existing global institutions and the emergence of new actors and regimes clearly provide an opportunity for understanding the agenda setting potential of global institutions.

Applied to my study, I am mainly focusing on the scope of institutional arrangements between the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank to better understand this agenda setting potential of the ILO Decent Work Agenda.
1.2.3 International Labour Organization and Decent Work Agenda

The institution of primary interest in my dissertation is the International Labour Organization. It was established in 1919 as a civil service, with British and French influences and a strong commitment to peace and social justice. The ILO includes tripartite representation from employers, workers and state representatives. The institution was originally envisioned as an “instrument of international social reform”. Progress on labour legislation was seen as one way to organize peace and promote social justice and to ensure that “labour [would] not be regarded merely as a commodity or article of commerce”. The ILO has as its mandate to promote social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights.

In response to persistently poor working conditions, in 1999, the ILO launched the Decent Work Agenda to encourage all nations to develop country-level policies that provide women and men the opportunity to work in freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The creation of this Agenda coincided with the arrival of a new director-general, Mr. Somavia, a human rights lawyer from Chile. The Agenda defines ‘decent work’ as the sum of the aspirations of people for “opportunity and income; rights, voice and recognition; family stability and personal development; and, fairness and gender equality”. It includes four strategic conditions - employment, social protection, fundamental rights and social dialogue. The Decent Work Agenda has been linked to all eight United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through decent and productive employment, social protection, rights at work and the promotion of social dialogue. The promotion of decent work was also advanced as one strategy for alleviating poverty and hunger (MDG #1) through “full and productive employment and decent work for all”. The ILO Decent Work Agenda therefore provides a starting point for examining how global policy agendas can be influenced. As we approach 2015, seventeen sustainable development goals are being proposed to advance the global development agenda. These goals include among others the need to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” ; however, it remains to be seen whether the decent work term and the Decent Work Agenda will be picked up in the post-2015 agenda after all.
1.3 Study rationale

In this dissertation, I investigate how a policy instrument such as the ILO Decent Work Agenda contributes to agenda setting by influencing the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank. My dissertation also examines the different health, economic and social conceptualizations of decent work that frame global policy agendas about work. Health equity and market-based and economic lenses (further described in Chapter 2) are used as theoretical frames for identifying and analyzing different conceptualizations of decent work at play in the policy agendas of the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank, and for determining how these are discursively produced in order to establish, reinforce, or create competing agendas about work.

1.3.1 Relevant literature

The rationale for my dissertation is informed by two key bodies of literature: (1) knowledge about decent work, why its pursuit matters in economic, social and health terms (see section 1.2.1), and possible conceptualizations of decent work, and (2) agenda setting theories from the policy literature. This review of relevant literature also serves to situate the contributions of my dissertation to our knowledge base about agenda setting using the Decent Work Agenda as an illustrative case example.

1.3.1.1 Decent work: Health equity and market-based and economic conceptualizations

Several landmark reports have argued for achieving greater health equity globally. To achieve health equity, everyone must reach his/her full health potential and not be disadvantaged from attaining this potential as a result of age, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, socioeconomic status or any other socially determined circumstance.22-23,4 Health inequities are systematic
differences in health status or in the distribution of resources among population sub-groups that are deemed avoidable and unjust. Powerful global actors can interfere with the efforts of health and other sectors because they are more interested in protecting sovereignty or pursuing economic goals, pursuits which can in turn create health inequities.

Heymann and Earle identify a number of claims that counter policy efforts to achieve decent working conditions for all: a “bad” job is better than no job; labour laws and standards are irrelevant because they are seldom implemented; and lower income nations must endure poor working conditions until they “develop their infrastructure, technology and productivity”

These claims shift the emphasis away from rights, fairness, health equity and gender equality to privilege economic arguments that support competitiveness and productivity at all costs, including labour protection. Such economic arguments are generally influenced by neoliberal economic thinking that favours the role of markets as the best distribution mechanism for goods and services (see Chapter 2 for more details). This type of economic thinking matters because policies that do not only involve the market have been shown to protect the workforce from insecurities of the labour market.

In summary, heterogeneous conceptualizations of “decent work” challenge the notion that there is only one monolithic and neutral decent work agenda in the global arena. In contrast, different conceptualizations of “decent work” likely operate in the setting of global policy agendas. Through my dissertation, I account for some of the different ways that decent work is conceptualized, including the dominant discourses and the silences at play, and how my accounts contribute to our understanding of which conceptualizations are gaining greater or less prominence in the setting of policy agendas by three global institutions – the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank.
1.3.2 Research questions

My dissertation is a qualitative study of the ILO Decent Work Agenda, which aims to deepen our understanding of this policy document’s particular role in influencing the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank. My dissertation is framed by two questions (outlined below) and includes two study components (i.e. key informant interviews and a discourse analysis of policy texts, which are further described in section 1.5).

1. What different health, economic, and social conceptualizations of ‘decent work’ are reflected in the work policy agendas of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank?

2. What discursive role has the ILO Decent Work Agenda played in setting the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank? Specifically, how are concepts, assumptions and claims in the Decent Work Agenda used to influence the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank?

1.4 Relevant theories

My approach to design and analysis was theoretically informed by agenda setting theories and Foucault’s conceptions of discourse and power. These are described below as well as in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

1.4.1 Agenda setting in policy

The vast public policy literature offers insights to help conceptualize and analyze policy processes. A prominent perspective in this literature suggests that several stages exist in the policy process: agenda setting (i.e. how policy makers become aware of the problem or issue),
policy formulation (creation of options and choice of the “best” policy option), policy implementation (putting policies into action) and evaluation (monitoring the results). In recent years, the policy literature has shifted from depicting policy development as a linear, rational and incremental process to approaches that put the emphasis on the legitimacy, salience, feasibility, and public acceptance of a policy issue and support for it by influential and powerful actors.

From my perspective, this shift has also occurred in part because linear conceptualizations of the policy process fail to take into account how language and practices shape, legitimize and support policy agendas through discourses and the interactions of different institutions. The discourses in policy texts that are produced through the interactions of global institutions offer a rich source of data to investigate how policy agenda setting processes are shaped. Empirical research can help draw out the possible character of competing narratives defined by the fields within which they operate, and by which means they are framed – by the language of economics, human rights or health equity, for instance. These frames do not operate on the same level playing field, which Rushton and Williams attribute to the dominance of neoliberalism in global health policy-making. They argue that neoliberalism constitutes a ‘deep core’ of beliefs, which structures what is “sayable”, “doable”—and even what is “thinkable”— in the global health policy arena. My dissertation is therefore conceived as a critical discourse analysis of policy agenda setting, which focuses on what political, economic and social regimes are reinforced, and who wins and who loses in using certain notions of decent work. It investigates the ILO Decent Work Agenda’s discursive role in influencing the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank.

1.4.1.1 Agenda setting theories

Over the last several decades, scholarly work on agenda setting has largely been defined by two distinct research thrusts – one oriented towards public agenda setting and the other policy agenda setting (the focus of this dissertation). In his landmark contribution, Schattschneider noted that the “outcome of all conflict is determined by the scope of its contagion. The number of people involved in any conflict determines what happens; every change in the number of participants, every increase or reduction in the number of participants affects the result”. A decade later,
Downs argued that issues move through a cycle of public interest while Cobb and Elders emphasized agenda building by highlighting which issues can have the greatest salience and the role of actors in facilitating these changes in salience over time.\textsuperscript{30,31} Dearing further contributed to our understanding of agenda setting by defining an agenda as “a ranking of the relative importance of various public issues… issues vary in importance or salience relative to other issues – the order of issues, based on salience, is an agenda”.\textsuperscript{32(p310)}

Contributions from Kingdon and Baumgartner and Jones followed from the previous theorists.\textsuperscript{1,33} Kingdon’s multiple streams model and Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory were applied in my dissertation to further understanding of how health and social issues get and stay on policy agendas. Both theories cover the entire agenda setting process. My dissertation draws upon these two widely-used theories to understand agenda setting processes in the global policy arena. These theories conceptualize agenda setting as random, iterative and dynamic rather than predictable and linear.\textsuperscript{2} The former view of agenda setting is particularly applicable in the global arena, which is characterized as a contested space with a diversity of social actors seeking to compete for attention and gain legitimacy.\textsuperscript{12}

According to Kingdon, agenda setting occurs where there is convergence between three streams – problems, policies and politics.\textsuperscript{1} Convergence between streams is often chaotic and unpredictable. The agenda is more affected by the problem and political streams than by the policy stream. Windows of opportunity open because of a political stream or they open because a newly emerging problem garners attention of policy makers. These windows allow for policy entrepreneurs (e.g. organizations) to advance a solution or alternative to the problem. Kingdon’s agenda setting theory is grounded in empirical work involving public policy-making from the perspective of national governments.

Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory characterizes the policy context as dynamic and punctuated by periods of stability and rapid transformation.\textsuperscript{33} Their theory
emphasizes the role of events as well as precedents in explaining how policy agendas are set. The focus is more on issue definition (i.e. decent work in this dissertation) because it is the “driving force in both periods of stability and instability” that can mobilize those who were not interested in the past. Issue definition is central to an analysis of their notion of agenda access because it is able to provoke the punctuated equilibrium cycle in politics. The theory acknowledges that agenda setting is a dynamic and interactive set of processes and argues for the need to understand contextual influences on these processes. Applied to my dissertation, contextual influences include globalization and other macro-economic factors and their influence on labour markets, employment security and working conditions.

The multiple streams and punctuated equilibrium theories have been applied to several studies of agenda setting around health and social issues. However, studies of agenda setting in public health in the global context are less frequent. These theories offer useful conceptual tools for examining the dynamic and iterative nature of agenda setting processes, the means by which agendas are accessed, and the role of catalytic events and precedents. Their strengths and limitations as applied to my dissertation about the agenda setting potential of the Decent Work Agenda are further analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4.

1.4.2 Foucault’s notions of discourse and power

A critical discourse analysis puts the emphasis on what political, economic and social regimes are reinforced, and who wins and who loses in setting policy agendas. In the context of my dissertation, global institutions such as the ILO must balance social, political, economic, and health considerations in setting work policy agendas. Formal and informal rules and norms govern the interactions and the power relations between global institutions. It is therefore critical to understand the processes of collective interaction among institutions with different agendas and diverse values and assumptions, rather than from the perspective of any one institution. This interaction is inherently diverse and characterized by struggles for power and capital in an often highly politicized space. Foucault’s relational characterization of power as exercised (as
opposed to possessed) therefore provided a useful starting point for analysis. Foucault noted that “hegemonic or global forms of power rely in the first instance on their infinitesimal practices, which exist in those institutions on the fringes”. Global forms of power can produce knowledge and discourses at many levels. Foucault’s assertion that power is not easily located, as it runs through notions and practices and is localized through expression of everyday practices of actors, provides a lens for interrogating how the disciplinary and regulatory techniques of power reinforce discourses that pervade current framings of “decent” work. Through my dissertation work, I characterize how such operating disciplinary and regulatory techniques of power reinforce these discourses. Techniques of power include policy instruments and objects as means through which social actors such as the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank exercise a normalizing gaze and contribute to ways of normalizing what constitutes “decent work”.

In the context of my dissertation, examples of instruments include policy narratives such as the ILO Decent Work Agenda and political summit declarations but they can also extend to conventions, labour codes and health and safety guidelines, which are part of the labour production cycle and reinforce notions of what constitutes decent work. Techniques of disciplinary and regulatory power relating to decent work are further described in the findings from the discourse analysis of policy texts and key informant interviews (see Chapters 2 and 3).

In summary, Foucault’s notions of discourse and power provided conceptual tools to characterize and interrogate the different discourses related to “decent work” and how power is produced and reproduced through policy narratives about them. For instance, institutions internalize or reflect market-based conceptualizations of decent work and encourage workers to participate in a production cycle regardless of the risks which it poses. Such conceptualizations can ultimately threaten worker well-being, as they reinforce the production of material while resulting in social deprivation and hazardous working conditions. This discourse about work can co-exist with a discourse on health equity, calling for resistance against poor working conditions where they are deemed unfair, unjust and therefore not decent. For my dissertation, I acknowledge that “decent work” is not a monolithic notion and that multiple accounts do co-exist. I also take the stance that more attention needs to be paid to the role of powerful normalizing discourses maintained
by privileged groups and disciplinary powers (e.g. the language of economics that reinforces market-based approaches) and to emergent discourses that may be masked because the resources for constructing them are less available. As I will further explore in Chapter 2, notions of “decent work” that favour market-based approaches and the goals of competitiveness may suppress other workers’ rights-based discourses promoting equitable working conditions, particularly given the dominance of economic logics in global health policy-making.

1.5 Methods

In keeping with the research questions, I designed a qualitative research study that relied on data from publicly-accessible archival policy texts such as the Decent Work Agenda and related documents and key informant interviews with representatives from three global institutions – the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank. The methodological approach that underpinned each study component is further outlined below.

1.5.1 Discourse analysis of policy texts

Critical discourse analysis involves a process of studying how social relations, identities, knowledge, and power are constructed in spoken and written texts. Power produces knowledge and certain discourses that get internalized by social actors and influences the way they operate in the context of political and social agenda setting processes. In my dissertation, I systematically examine the concepts, assumptions and claims used in policy texts. Through this critical discourse analysis of policy agenda setting, I emphasize what political, economic and social regimes are reinforced, and who wins and who loses in using certain notions of ‘decent work’. Different social contexts and the language associated with each, affects the readings of texts. I argue that failure to account for these multiple interpretations by different social actors otherwise ignores what forms of knowledge or accumulations of social norms, rituals and practices might shape the different narratives about a problem (indecent work in the context of
my dissertation). My analysis therefore also pays attention to the global context in which texts are generated, the logics, claims, assumptions and techniques used, and the ways in which texts operate and shape different practices. It identifies oppressive and facilitating practices and sees texts as constructions of multiple realities in their own right.

1.5.1.1 Selection of policy texts

I selected texts primarily produced by one or more of the three following global institutions – the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank – because they each play a role in developing and shaping labour, economic and/or health policy in the global arena, and were aware or directly involved in the development and implementation of the Decent Work Agenda. I selected 10 publicly accessible documents ranging in purpose, length and format and produced between 1999 and 2012 (with the exception of constitutional documents) using pre-defined selection criteria (see Chapter 2 for further details). In keeping with the selection criteria, I selected policy texts through an initial web search, which was refined following consultations with interview participants from the ILO, the WHO, and the World Bank. I chose the 1999-2012 timeframe because it aligns with the development and roll-out of the Decent Work Agenda and key events such as the arrival of a new leader at the ILO in 1999, and the 2008-2009 economic crisis. This delimited timeframe facilitates an in-depth analysis of a more manageable number of texts given the resource limitations of the study.

I chose these ten texts because these were more central to decent work and the policy narratives thought to inform these texts (see Chapter 2). I also included examples of texts that were jointly produced by at least two institutions included in this study. While constitutional documents shed light on an institution’s history and mandate, they were not the primary object of analysis because my dissertation did not primarily focus on the institutions themselves. For each of the 10 policy texts, I determined the number of times the following key terms recurred: decent work, Decent Work Agenda and job(s). The results are reported in Chapter 2. A frequency count helps to not only illustrate how often a term appears in a given policy text but it can also be used to
demonstrate how a term’s occurrence changes over time. It is, however, not meant to explain how terms are conceptualized or used in the context of policy texts.

My critical discourse analysis is in keeping with the approach used by Fairclough outlined above\textsuperscript{41}, which is informed by a Foucauldian notion of power. I also drew on relevant literature on health equity and market-based and economic conceptualizations of decent work (as outlined in section 1.3.1.1) to conduct an in-depth discourse analysis of 10 policy texts, using the following guiding questions, a core component of my analytic framework (see Appendix A):

- How is each text framed (e.g. are the texts in question ‘thin’ to make them easier to be accepted by a broader constituency?)?
- What values and assumptions do these texts imply? (e.g. Do I see broader health equity and market-oriented discourses reflected in these texts?)?
- What positioning and authority do these texts invoke?
- What rhetorical devices are used to construct an authoritative and official account through these texts?
- Does this sample of texts represent an interconnected system of knowledge about decent work policy?
- What are the relationships between these texts? (intertextuality)\textsuperscript{45} How might different texts draw upon each other to contribute to agenda setting processes about decent work? For instance, are there recurring elements in texts that position an issue like decent work and are reinforced in the policy texts of other global institutions such as the WHO and World Bank?
- What might this tell us about the rules governing global institutions and how these institutions are mutually influencing each other to set global work policy?; and,
- Taken together, what does this analysis tell me about which discourses shape global work policy agendas?

Chapter 2 further outlines the approach taken to select and analyze the 10 policy texts and the findings from this in-depth textual analysis.
1.5.2 Key informant interviews

I conducted key informant interviews to understand how three global institutions (the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank) influence each other’s agenda setting processes in order to develop work policy and to surface common and contrasting conceptualizations of decent work and the Decent Work Agenda. Interviews with representatives from all three institutions were preferred to a singular investigation of the ILO for the following reasons. A comparison of different global institutions’ perspectives yields data on which conceptualizations of decent work are commonly held and which reflect individually-held interests within and across institutions and constitute the global policy agenda setting arena. By contrasting similarities and differences in perspectives of different institutional actors, I analyzed how language constructs and legitimates the ways in which an issue like decent work can arise on the policy agenda of these global institutions (see Chapter 3).

I invited a total of twenty-five individuals to participate by e-mail between October 2011 and May 2012 using a standard recruitment letter, which included information about the study and the consent form (see Chapter 3). The interviews were used to identify what processes influence the setting of policy agendas, including what forms of knowledge, social norms, rules and claims (e.g. health, social, economic) affect how different conceptualizations of decent work play out in agenda setting from each of their perspectives. The selection of participants was purposive. I chose individuals on the basis of their expected ability to provide relevant insights about the topic under study.46 Some participants were already known to me based on preliminary consultations with the ILO, the WHO and also the Canadian Labour Congress (which regularly deals with the ILO), while others were identified through a combination of referral and snowballing techniques following the conduct of initial interviews.47,48 Temporal factors such as organizational reforms impacted on key informant recruitment. I further describe the sampling approach and other recruitment challenges faced in Chapter 3.
I used data from the initial round of interviews to inform the subsequent selection of participants and documents to help reformulate observations grounded in the data.\textsuperscript{49, 50} For instance, the repeated mention by informants of the anticipated launch of the World Development Report on Jobs in October 2012 warranted its inclusion in the study, and extended the timelines for implementing my research.

The selection of participants presented theoretical and methodological challenges. This is because participants can both speak on their own accord as well as for the institutions they represent.\textsuperscript{10} My approach to interviewing therefore provided participants with the opportunity to describe and frame issues from individual and institutional perspectives of decent work and the Decent Work Agenda, in order to permit the emergence of ideas that were outside of my own theoretical framework.\textsuperscript{51} (see Appendices C and D for the interview guides).

I conducted all semi-structured interviews face-to-face or by phone. I documented potential differences in the comprehension of interview questions, duration, depth of responses, level of interest, and engagement, with consideration given to how these may impact the generation and analysis of interview data. No major differences were noted between phone and face-to-face interviews but the number of interviews may not be sufficient for surfacing actual differences. Following the first interview with an ILO representative, one of the questions was slightly altered from: “How did you/your organization get involved in the Decent Work Agenda?” to “How did you get involved in the Decent Work (DW) Agenda? /what is your involvement in the DW Agenda?” In the case of the interviews with the WHO and World Bank, when informants were asked: what influences decent work policy at the global level? Do any challenges arise? What are they? I frequently had to probe using such terms as “what factors” influence policy in order to get an actual response. When asking ‘what influences DW policy at the global level?’ I did not need to use additional probes as often with ILO interviewees. In asking the questions, I ensured that participants were given the chance to comment from both their individual and institutional perspective, which was effective for the most part. In the analysis, I was thus usually able to make the distinction between individual versus institutional perspective (e.g. the use of phrases such as “I personally think”; “in my opinion”; “this is not necessarily the view of my
organization” were particularly telling). When transitioning from questions on decent work to the Decent Work Agenda, I frequently needed to emphasize the focus on the Agenda to generate new information and to ensure the respondent focused on the Decent Work Agenda. For the question about collaboration, I needed to ask outright for examples of working with other global institutions of interest to my dissertation to solicit responses.

Interviews were taped and transcribed and data was stored in accordance with privacy and confidentiality requirements. See Chapter 3 for details about the length, profile of interviewees and interview questions. Of the 25 contacted, I conducted interviews with 16 key informants, which provided the necessary level of saturation. Saturation was achieved with the emergence of recurring themes for which no new insights about decent work and the agenda setting potential of the Decent Work Agenda was forthcoming. I sequentially generated codes through a combination of very descriptive codes emerging directly from the key informant data and more conceptual codes informed by the literature. Through an iterative process, I conducted a thematic analysis to identify overall patterns in the key informant data. I then made links to the research questions and the literature on agenda setting and policy (see section 1.4 for details and Appendix B). I also contrasted the similarities and differences in themes within and across interviews to provide a better understanding of policy agenda setting processes at work within and across these three global institutions.

The following privacy and confidentiality requirements were taken into account in the design and implementation of this study.

- Personal identifying information was not included in any written transcripts, field observation notes, or analytic memos to the extent that this is possible. This was limited in part by the number of interviews conducted per organization.
- Data were stored on a password protected computer.
- Participant names were not revealed in any publication of study findings. However, it was not possible to conceal the identities of participating institutions. Participants were asked whether summary information about their job title or role within each institution could be revealed in any publication.
- The consent form made it clear that the participant can agree (or not) to be contacted at a future point to clarify comments. This was not needed for any of the interviews.
- Summary documents of key findings will be available to participants at the end of the study.
- No information received from initial participants in the study (including their identities) was revealed to subsequent study participants, including referrals through snowballing.
- All documents, field notes, transcripts and memos were kept in a secure location to which only the student-researcher had access. For data transcription involving a third party, an encrypted USB key was used to transfer data back to the student-researcher.
1.6 Thesis outline

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 consist of two manuscripts and one commentary, which have all been submitted to three different peer-reviewed journals. Chapter 2 has been resubmitted following peer review comments to Social Science and Medicine. Chapter 3 has been published by Globalization and Health, and Chapter 4 has been accepted for publication by the American Journal of Public Health.

In Chapter 2, I outline my theoretical and methodological approach to a discourse analysis of 10 policy texts produced by the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank, which reveals different health, economic, and social claims about decent work and how these are discursively shaped by the work policy agendas of these three institutions. Findings suggest that decent work is a contested notion, and that more than one “agenda” is operating in the face of vested institutional interests. Broader discourses are contributing to a reframing of decent work in economic, social and/or health terms, which is having an impact on which dimensions of work are being emphasized and taken up in policy texts at the expense of others.

In Chapter 3, I outline the methods and results from 16 key informant interviews with representatives from the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank. Findings suggest that the pursuit of decent work and the Decent Work Agenda are perceived as important goals with the potential to promote equitable policies. While the Agenda is found to be closely linked to the World Health Organization’s conception of health as a human right, decent work is repeatedly identified by World Bank informants as the terminology ILO uses compared to such terms as job creation and job access. The limited evidence base for decent work and its conceptual nature are offered as partial explanations for why the Agenda has yet to fully influence other global institutions.
In **Chapter 4**, I provide an analysis of the utility of two agenda setting theories as applied at the global level to the study of the ILO Decent Work Agenda: Kingdon’s multiple streams model and Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory.\(^1\)\(^{33}\) Findings suggest Kingdon’s three streams (problems, policies and politics) do apply at the global level and that convergence has been modestly achieved. There is also evidence of the saliency of decent work as an issue mobilizing attention and of the role played by policy entrepreneurs in agenda setting. Applied to a global context, further research is needed to better characterize the nature and extent of interactions and power struggles among global actors, including the control imposed by global financial actors, documenting whose perspectives and values are heard and silenced, and the impact of these actors’ influence on who sets and frames policy agendas in the global work arena.

In **Chapter 5**, I present a synthesis of findings from both study components - the discourse analysis of policy texts and key informant interviews with the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank representatives. I reflect on the findings in relation to the theories applied (Chapter 4). I also highlight implications for research and policy that may inform future directions taken by researchers, policy makers and global institutions involved in global health, labour and/or work and health policy.

### 1.7 Role of author in thesis

My preliminary background work involved combing the ILO archives to learn more about the ILO, its history, and to help refine my research topic. Under the guidance of my thesis committee, I designed this qualitative study, which consisted of three lines of inquiry – a discourse analysis of policy texts (Chapter 2), key informant interviews (Chapter 3) and an analysis of the utility of two agenda setting theories at the global level, using data from my dissertation (Chapter 4).
Establishing credibility is a key to ensuring trustworthiness and also rigour in the qualitative research process\textsuperscript{54}. As noted above, I applied two well-established methods of qualitative inquiry in concert. These included: purposive sampling of key informants and a discourse analysis method. I familiarized myself with the participating institutions before conducting interviews and the discourse analysis of policy texts. My experience and qualifications were critical to ensuring a rigorous and credible process as the interviewer is a key instrument for data collection\textsuperscript{48}. My well-established professional connections enabled me to more easily identify and recruit key informants from three large global institutions. In addition to being a part-time flex student at the University of Toronto, I work as a senior director for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research-Institute of Population and Public Health. In this capacity, I have the privilege of interacting with researchers and organizations across Canada and internationally. For instance, my well-developed connections with global health researchers allowed me to more easily identify who to contact at the World Bank and the WHO and also helped me to address some of the recruitment challenges I faced (see Chapter 3 for details). I was also put in touch with the head librarian at the ILO who granted me access to their archives so that I could familiarize myself with the history of the ILO.

I developed all key informant interview guides, recruited all key informants, conducted all interviews and coded and analyzed interview data. I developed the sampling and analytic approach, selected the sample of policy texts and conducted an in-depth analysis of 10 policy texts. With respect to recruitment, I gave each potential informant the opportunity to refuse to participate in the research to ensure that only those who were really willing to take part were interviewed. At the start of each interview, I established a rapport and trust with informants. I put them at ease and encouraged them to answer any or all questions they felt comfortable answering. I used open ended questions to allow informants to elaborate on answers (see Appendices C and D for interview guides). I used probes to elicit more detailed responses. I provided regular briefings to my thesis committee as interviews were completed and preliminary analyses of data were conducted to solicit additional or alternative perspectives. I examined my findings in relation to an explicitly defined analytic framework\textsuperscript{47,48} (see Appendices A and B).
I wrote all drafts of thesis chapters, including the three manuscripts for publication (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4), and integrated feedback from members of my thesis committee and from peer reviewers (in the case of Chapters 2, 3, and 4). “I” is used in Chapters 1 and 5. In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, ‘we’ is used because these chapters involve multiple co-authors. My role as lead author for each accepted or submitted manuscript for publication is clearly indicated in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.
1.8 References


Chapter 2 Competing conceptualizations of decent work at the intersection of health, social and economic discourses

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2.1 Introduction

Work is central to economic and social progress and the well-being of individuals, families, and societies. The ILO defines decent work as the sum of people’s “aspirations for opportunity and income; rights, voice and recognition; family stability and personal development; and fairness and gender equality”.¹ The ILO Decent Work (DW) Agenda delineates four strategic directions—creating employment, guaranteeing rights at work, extending social protection and promoting social dialogue.¹ While the DW Agenda’s existence may imply consensus about “decent work”, global efforts to improve working conditions remain stalled with profound implications for workers’ health.² About 1,000 workers mostly in poorer countries are estimated to die daily because of unsafe working conditions and another 5,000 from work-related diseases.³ Growing societal inequalities are reinforced by economic policies that result in the unfair distribution of and access to health and social resources such as decent and safe working conditions.⁴,⁵ We contend that the lack of consensus about the meaning of decent work can partially explain this limited progress in improving global healthy working conditions. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) can reveal how asymmetries in power relations contribute to different conceptualizations of decent work.

Using the ILO definition of decent work and its DW Agenda as reference points, we first depict the global institutional context and possible conceptualizations of decent work by reviewing relevant work and health and economic literatures. We then outline the research questions,
methods, theory report findings from the CDA of 10 policy texts, and critically reflect on their implications for achieving global decent working conditions.

2.2 Background

2.2.1 Global institutional context

Global institutions operate within a dynamic context shaped by economic, political, technological and socio-cultural forces\(^6,7\) as well as their own mission, goals and culture. Different institutional perspectives must be negotiated in the planning of decent work policy, with various rules and norms governing the power relations between institutions.\(^7\) These and other contextual influences affect an institution’s ability to promote “one” agenda in the face of other vested institutional interests.\(^8\)

The ILO was established in 1919 with a commitment to social justice, and to tripartite representation from employers, workers and states\(^9\). This specialized agency operates within the United Nations (UN) multilateral system, which involves more than 30 affiliated institutions including the World Health Organization (WHO). In 1999, the ILO launched the DW Agenda to encourage “decent work-oriented approaches to economic and social policy in partnership with the principal institutions and actors of the multilateral system and the global economy”.\(^1\) The Agenda’s four directions address job creation in the name of reducing poverty and income inequality; guaranteeing rights at work through relevant conventions and labour standards as means of protecting workers’ rights; social protection through social security coverage and dignified work for personal growth and development; and, social dialogue (through tripartism involving governments, employers and workers, collective bargaining and worker participation).\(^1\)
Since 1948, the ILO and the WHO have cooperated on matters such as joint health and safety guidelines for workers and the ILO-UN Social Protection Floor Initiative.\textsuperscript{10,11} The ILO and World Bank have collaborated more recently. While not formally part of the UN system, the World Bank was established in 1944 by Allied Nations as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to support development and poverty reduction.\textsuperscript{12} Created along with the International Monetary Fund as part of the Bretton Woods system, the Bank shapes global labour policy through its financing, research and technical assistance functions.\textsuperscript{12} These institutions operate in a politicized and contested global policy space connected by “sets of informal and formal rules that prescribe roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations”.\textsuperscript{7(p2)} In summary, an understanding of the global institutional context is central to discourse analysis as texts are constructed out of the context in which they are produced.\textsuperscript{13} We assert that it is at the intersection of power relations between these global institutions that decent work and its underlying logics and claims are discursively shaped. We argue that work is a contested notion, and turn to the literature and institutional documents for possible conceptualizations to inform our analysis.

2.2.2 Different conceptualizations of decent work

Work is an inherently social, economic and health phenomenon. The ILO decent work concept is rooted in the principles of human rights, gender, social, and health equity, including in particular the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. While many definitions of health equity exist, we use the following widely-cited definition: Health equity is created when everyone can reach their full health potential and not be disadvantaged from reaching this potential as a result of age, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, socioeconomic status or any other socially determined circumstance.\textsuperscript{14} Health equity is also grounded in notions of fairness, social justice and human rights.\textsuperscript{4} Health equity is embedded in the DW Agenda - it calls for work that is safe, secure and that provides a livable income and social protection should a worker become ill. Decent work is also associated with improved health outcomes and lower levels of disease and injury.\textsuperscript{3} Yet the achievement of decent work for many workers remains unattainable because they face material deprivation and discrimination on the basis of gender,
social class, ethnicity and/or race. We contend that the elusive nature of achieving decent work is derived in part from the privileging by employers of economic interests over considerations of equitable access to working conditions.

A second possible conceptualization of work is rooted in economic arguments. Markets are dynamic and range from the micro-level with a focus on local economies to national and multi-national markets. They are influenced by different economic theories, which create “rival views of market society.” While the Keynesian perspective reflects a pro-poor position by supporting the less fortunate so they will consume more to boost demand and consumption, the more dominant neoliberal view of the past few decades gives resources to corporations to invest wisely. “Different economic theories empower, and dis-empower different political and economic constituencies.” This matters because public policies that are dominated by neoliberal ideology have been shown to negatively affect health and human development through more restrictive state interventions in economic and social policies, and the deregulation of labour and financial markets.

Heymann and Earle identified several claims from their research on labour laws in 190 countries countering the goal of acceptable working conditions for all. These include: a “bad” job is better than no job; labour laws and standards are irrelevant because they are seldom implemented; and lower income nations must endure poor working conditions until they “develop their infrastructure, technology and productivity.” These economic arguments emphasize competitiveness and productivity at all cost. Contemporary pro-market approaches result from the 1970s revolution in macroeconomic theory that stems from neoliberal economics, and is grounded in two assumptions: individuals are self-interested agents who maximize the pursuit of those interests, and “markets clear”, which means that the supply and demand for something (e.g. jobs) is in perfect equilibrium, with no excess supply or unfilled demand. This approach to

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Keynes, one of the most influential economists of the 20th century advanced the potential for interventionist government policy by employing fiscal measures to manage economic ups and downs.
economics employs discourses such as “markets are growth” and “productivity engines”, “markets as the best distribution mechanism for goods and services”, and “markets know what’s best because they reflect individual, optimal and efficient choices.”

To identify whether the above conceptualizations of decent work were present in policy texts, we designed a discourse analysis to answer the following study questions: What are the health, economic, and social conceptualizations of decent work reflected in the work policy agendas of the ILO, WHO, and World Bank?; And, how do concepts, assumptions and claims in the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda influence the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank?

2.3 Methods

We draw on the techniques of CDA, defined as a process of studying how social relations, identities, knowledge and power are constructed in spoken and written texts. A CDA was the preferred method because of its demonstrated applicability to examining how texts can be biased towards a certain ideology and how they are shaped by power relations. Other scholars have used CDA techniques to analyze policy discourses. A CDA seeks to “explore often opaque relationships between discursive practices, events and texts and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes… and [how] these arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power.” Discourses include interrelated sets of policy texts and the practices of production, dissemination, and reception by social actors who bring a particular version of social reality into being. The strength of CDA is therefore not only to account for how often a concept is used but also to describe how concepts are reinforced and sustained in written rhetoric.

From a critical perspective, discourses and practices are contested and mediated by power relations between global institutions. Our analytic framework was informed by Foucault’s
conception of the dynamic relationship between power and knowledge in shaping social reality. Foucault argued that knowledge and discourses produce broader social and cultural structures, relations and processes that get reproduced and taken up in texts and social practices.\textsuperscript{25} We applied Foucault’s conception of governmentality (the ‘conduct of conducts’ or how practices are shaped at a distance), because it enables identification of the impact of various forms of procedural and institutional power on global actors.\textsuperscript{26,27} Global actors collectively promote and secure a certain form of global social order through their interactions around policies and procedures, which can have negative health and social effects.\textsuperscript{5} We examined the logics and claims in policy texts from three institutions to contrast how discourses about decent work and the texts in which they are embedded carry traces of the implicit doctrines and beliefs that underpin dominant or emerging political, economic, or other systems of thought.\textsuperscript{25} We suggest that these texts carry the imprints of each institution’s mandate– the ILO stands for social justice and human and labour rights, the WHO for the right to health, and the World Bank for reducing poverty and promoting development through financial assistance. We next describe our approach to selecting and analyzing policy texts. This textual analysis was exempt from ethics review.

2.4 Selection of texts

Ten publicly accessible documents ranging in purpose, length and format that were produced between 1998 and 2012 were selected (section 2.7.1, Table 1). This time period corresponds to the development and implementation of the ILO’s Agenda, with several events such as the arrival of a new leader at the ILO in 1999, the 2008-2009 financial crisis, and the release of the World Bank Report on Jobs in October 2012. Six of ten texts were produced by the ILO, the WHO or the World Bank, three were jointly prepared by the ILO and either the WHO or the World Bank, and one by G20 leaders following the Cannes Summit.

The Decent Work Agenda (one of 10 texts) was the starting point. Texts more central to decent work, that were jointly produced by at least two institutions, and provided context on each institution’s mandate were also included. For ILO texts, the text had to be central to the advancement of the DW Agenda and/or have a particular focus on social protection because of
its relevance to health and health equity, and potential for contrast to other conceptualizations (i.e. market-based approaches). The text also had to describe critical events of relevance to understanding the context in which the ILO and its DW Agenda operate; and, have a relationship to other texts produced by the WHO or the World Bank. In selecting WHO and World Bank texts, we assessed the extent to which these institutions’ texts reinforce, contradict or are silent on the ILO definition of decent work using the following criteria:

- Text represents inter-textual chains by outlining commitments between the ILO and either institution to cooperate on advancing the decent work agenda (e.g. speeches, cooperation agreements); and,
- Text is expected to provide a contrasting perspective to the DW Agenda.

Constitutional documents provided insights on the institutional mandates but they were excluded as main objects of in-depth analysis because our study did not primarily focus on the history of the institutions themselves.

2.5 Data analysis

Our analytic approach to CDA was in keeping with the one used by others who have examined the reproduction of power asymmetries between institutions in texts and the social practices that enable some discourses to be advanced over others.\textsuperscript{13,20} We first determined the frequency of use for the terms ‘decent work’, ‘Decent Work Agenda’ and ‘job(s)’. While a count illustrates how frequently a term appears and changes in a term’s occurrence over time, it is not a substitute for how a term is used. In keeping with Fairclough’s approach to CDA\textsuperscript{22}, which draws upon Foucault’s conception of power, we conducted an in-depth reading, involving an analysis at different levels of specificity ranging from single words to phrases to entire texts. The lead author analyzed the texts to: surface implicit and explicit claims about decent work, including instances of health equity and economic justifications; and, explore the use of positioning and authority statements and rhetorical devices (e.g. metaphors), which encouraged adoption of a
decent work approach or not, or how a text reinforces the interests of powerful forces. The use of other linguistic techniques such as mood (e.g. use of declarative tone) and transitivity (e.g. who is doing what to whom?) were examined.\textsuperscript{22,28} Instances of intertextuality (i.e. borrowing words from another text) were examined to assess how texts draw upon each other to contribute similar and competing notions of “decent work”. In keeping with the study questions and with input from co-authors, a coding scheme was developed and refined by the first author according to the discursive elements that emerged from an iterative application of the above analytic framework and concepts in the literature (e.g. health equity) (see Appendix A). The first author undertook coding using ATLAS.ti 6.2 qualitative data management software in line with the above analytic approach.

2.6 Findings

We first describe the uses of decent work, Decent Work Agenda and job terms. We then explore emerging themes from our critical discourse analysis of 10 texts and their relationship to one or both study questions. Themes include: the challenges and realities of promoting “one” agenda; the complex intersection between decent work, health and health equity concepts; the emphasis on economic and pro-market interests versus the social dimensions of work; and, the relative emphasis on individual versus collective responsibility for decent work.

2.6.1 The presence of decent work, Decent Work Agenda and job terms

Table 2 (in section 2.7.2) outlines the frequency of use of decent work, DW Agenda and job terms across the policy texts. The variability in document length (range: 2 to 422 pages) should be noted in reviewing the frequency of use for each term, and so caution should be exercised when comparing these numbers. Nonetheless, even taking document length into account, the use of decent work decreased over time (from 1999 to 2012), and in several instances, references to decent work and the DW Agenda are noticeably absent. Given its centrality to the institution’s
policy activities, all ILO texts analyzed make liberal and explicit reference to decent work and the DW Agenda. Most ILO documents also feature declarative statements that position the decent work concept and the DW Agenda as fundamental to labour and employment policy development, encouraging full integration of the concept in policy processes.

“Nonetheless, employment and labour ministries need to enhance their capacity to engage with finance, trade and other ministries at the stage of policy development to ensure that the goal of decent work is “built in” (emphasis added) as opposed to “tacked on” to key government policies.”\(^{29(p6)}\)

In documents jointly produced with the WHO or the World Bank or independently by each of these institutions, decent work or the DW Agenda are mentioned far less frequently (section 2.7.2, Table 2), and explicit mention of the more all-encompassing decent work concept is eclipsed, or silenced in favour of other broader discourses about work. Implicit mentions of decent work are present in joint ILO/WHO documents, and include the need to protect workers’ health and rights, but not decent work. Instead, decent work is reframed in health and health equity terms through references to national policies that promote rights and social protection schemes\(^{iii}\) and link explicitly the protection of the health and rights of workers to accessing quality health services. This reframing is evident in the following statement from the WHO/ILO/UNAIDs:

“Countries must protect the health and rights of their health workers by optimizing their working conditions. By protecting health workers, countries would ensure that those providing health services are themselves healthy. This will in turn facilitate people’s rights of access to quality health services.”\(^{10(p1)}\)

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\(^{iii}\) Social protection schemes are a set of integrated social policies to guarantee income security and access to essential social services for all, in particular vulnerable groups.
Decent work is also implicitly mentioned in texts on the Better Work Partnership that was established in 2009 by the International Finance Cooperation (the private financing arm of World Bank Groups) and the ILO to improve compliance with labour standards and competitiveness in global supply chains. There are cursory references to social protection and fundamental rights for groups who need protection – both are linked to the ILO’s conception of decent work.

“Some of the key indicators include [a measure of] weak compliance with labour standards; industries that employ a larger number of workers, especially women and/or other disadvantaged groups (emphasis added).”  

In other texts, the decent work concept is absent. Instead, the term “job” is more frequently employed with periodic use of qualifiers such as good or better, in two of three joint WHO/ILO documents. Qualifying terms such as ‘good’ or ‘better’ imply some but not all features of the ILO decent work definition. According to the World Bank, “jobs are labor activities that generate income, monetary or in-kind without violating fundamental rights and principles at work…. jobs can take the form of wage employment, self-employment, and farming. They can be formal or informal.” In contrast, work is more all-encompassing and includes the social, physical and mental activities that are performed to accomplish something.

In summary, the presence (implicit and explicit), and absence of the decent work concept in the texts analyzed provide some indication of the frequency and preference of use in terms by different institutions; however, it does not shed light on how concepts are positioned through claims. To deepen understanding of which discourses were at play and being reinforced, we examined the influence of the DW Agenda on other work agendas. Overall findings are summarized in Table 3 (section 2.7.3).
2.6.2 The challenges and realities of promoting “one” Agenda

The Agenda is explicitly mentioned in most policy texts co-developed with the ILO with a few exceptions. This is expected because the DW Agenda functions as a frame for the ILO’s policy priorities. However, temporal context matters. Ten years after the DW Agenda’s creation, the ILO responded to the 2008-09 economic crisis with its ILO Global Jobs Pact. The ILO employs the term jobs (also part of the DW Agenda’s directions) and not decent work as an overarching positioning statement directed at the global community. That said, an analysis of the Pact reveals that it does draw upon the DW Agenda by making explicit references to the fundamental principles and rights at work, social protection, gender equality and social dialogue. The G8 endorsement of the Pact represents a form of third party validation to invoke legitimacy and authority for this approach and we would add framing as a ‘jobs’ pact.

At their Summit in July 2009, G8 leaders declared that the Global Jobs Pact is “relevant to respond to the crisis at worldwide level and advance the social dimension of globalization”, and that advanced, emerging and developing countries as well as international organizations should work together to ensure employment-oriented growth and promote social cohesion …”

An explicit focus on jobs appears in texts for state leaders:

“Our ultimate objective is to provide more and better jobs (bold for emphasis) for our citizens to promote social inclusion in all countries and to foster development and poverty reduction.”

The Bank’s Report on Jobs uses a similar tactic. It establishes early on that many job agendas exist: “If language shapes thinking, there are times when the ways in which people refer to jobs seem to be at odds. Gaps probably arise from the different characteristics of jobs being emphasized in different societies. [They] also suggest that jobs’ agendas can differ across countries” and state that “jobs agendas are diverse but connected.” There is a description of the DW Agenda, its four directions, which extends beyond jobs as earnings to include a
discussion of the value of jobs to individuals and society. It acknowledges how the DW Agenda has gained political buy-in with governments. Since 1999, “many governments have used it to articulate their policy agendas on jobs.” The World Bank does not claim to advance one agenda nor does it explicitly endorse the DW Agenda. It remains silent on the possibility of a common universal agenda, yet makes the connection between diverse agendas that are said to be warranted in different country contexts. We interpret this as the Bank subtly exerting its power through the competing knowledge it advances and normalizing certain beliefs about job creation and effective labour policy. While the discourse of more and better jobs reflects a form of response to the 2008-09 crisis, this narrower framing results in some dimensions of decent work (e.g. social protection) being taken up by some institutions and not others. These findings also point to partial and selective adoption of the DW Agenda by the WHO and less so by the World Bank. This partial adoption begs the question concerning the presence of health and health equity claims relating to decent work in these texts.

2.6.3 The intersection between decent work, health and health equity

Health and health equity principles related to work were found to be more explicitly present in ILO, WHO or joint ILO/WHO publications. Uses of health and/or health equity as justifications for access to decent work conditions were expressed through the language of guaranteeing workers’ rights, which is explicitly mentioned in the DW Agenda. Without stating decent work, these excerpts also speak to some DW Agenda directions, including social protection (e.g. preventing occupational health hazards) and social dialogue (“workers, employers and their representatives should participate in these activities”).

All workers should be able to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and favourable working conditions. The workplace should not be detrimental to health and well-being. Primary prevention of occupational health hazards should be given priority. ....

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iv This is the language of the right to health (particularly article 12.1 in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx)
Activities related to workers’ health should be planned, implemented and evaluated with a view to reducing inequalities in workers’ health within and between countries. Workers and employers and their representatives should also participate in such activities.  

“Measures need to be taken to minimize the gaps between different groups of workers in terms of levels of risk and health status. Particular attention should be paid to high-risk sectors of economic activity, and to the underserved and vulnerable working populations, such as younger and older workers, persons with disabilities and migrant workers, taking account of gender aspects.”

The WHO’s imperative to put the protection of workers’ health on the agenda of workplaces and global leaders, is not incompatible with decent work. When the WHO adopts economic rationales to demonstrate the value of investing in workers’ health, the impact of these interventions may, however, be inadvertently interpreted exclusively in economic terms. Quoting the 60th World Health Assembly, this WHO report positions: “health as a prerequisite for productivity and economic development”; “workers [as representing] half the world’s population [and as] major contributors to economic and social development”; and, calls for attention to “high-risk sectors of economic activity.” These strategic appeals to economic interests signal the influence of broader economic discourses, and represent instances of how health is being reframed in economic terms.

While the factors that affect fair access to jobs are acknowledged, some texts are more silent on the structural root causes of social and material deprivation resulting from work that is not fair. The emphasis is rather on what factors affect an individual’s opportunity to access a fair job.

“Fairness in access to jobs can actually be measured rigorously, building on the emerging literature on inequality of opportunity. This literature explores to what degree factors beyond talent and effort matter in accessing jobs. These factors include the circumstances in which a person is born: location, family background, gender, ethnicity, and language.”
While the World Bank gives a nod to health determinants (e.g. gender, ethnicity), their focus is on inequality of opportunity in accessing a job. Failure to attain health equity also entails an infringement on fairness and human rights. Based on these findings, we contend that contemporary pro-market approaches pose fundamental challenges to advancing a DW Agenda, which by definition encompasses a broader spectrum of social interventions. This led us to further interrogate the relative presence of pro-market and economic claims in these policy texts.

2.6.4 The emphasis on economic and pro-market interests versus the social dimensions of work

The language of economics and market-based solutions permeates several policy texts analyzed. However, texts differ in their treatment and positioning of these concepts. As early as 1919, the ILO Constitution called for: “All national and international policies and measures in particular those of an economic and financial character (emphasis added), [to be] be judged [through a worker’s rights lens], and accepted only in so far as they may be held to promote and not to hinder the achievement of this fundamental objective [e.g. all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity].”

In the more recently produced ILO texts analyzed, the language used is not as authoritative. Economic growth is said to be essential but not sufficient to ensure equity, social progress and the eradication of poverty. Similar claims are implied by the World Bank, which cautions forcefully against extending social protection, a core pillar of the DW Agenda.
“Formalizing countries need to design their social protection systems in ways that extend their coverage without penalizing employment [emphasis added].”

“In formalizing economies, there is an effort to support social cohesion by extending the coverage of social protection to as many workers as possible. Broad coverage regardless of the type of job is often seen as part of a social contract. But extending coverage without distorting incentives to work is difficult and may have adverse impacts on productivity and long-term growth.”

“Labor policies and institutions can improve labor market information, manage risk, and provide voice. But these advantages can come at the expense of labor market dynamism, reduced incentives for job creation and job search, and a gap in benefits between the covered and uncovered. The challenge is to set labor policies on a plateau—a range where regulations and institutions can at least partially address labor market imperfections without reducing efficiency.”

Protecting the most vulnerable through social protection schemes is acknowledged. Yet there is a strong drift towards privileging economic measures to foster job creation particularly in World Bank texts (e.g. exclusive use of jobs; promotion of social protection systems in ways that extend their coverage without penalizing employment). We also observed a shift in language used by the ILO following the 2008-09 post-economic crisis from one focused exclusively on decent work to a focus on jobs.

“This global policy instrument addresses the social and employment impact of the international financial and economic crisis. It promotes a productive recovery centred on investments, employment and social protection.”
“...[actions] promoting core labour standards and other international standards that support the economic and jobs recovery and reduce gender inequality..... ;ensuring that short-term actions are coherent with economic, social and environmental sustainability.”33(p3)

Economic and pro-market interests are often juxtaposed with social ones, reflecting a recurring tension across several texts analyzed. Not surprisingly, several policy texts call for balanced and realistic policy measures in response to the financial crisis. Balance is most often described in relation to social progress and economic development. The ILO argues that any response must reflect the DW Agenda and focus on protecting vulnerable workers and workers’ rights.

“A renewed effort to ratify and improve application of the Conventions concerning fundamental principles and rights at work would send a clear signal of the relevance of these instruments to shaping a fair globalization as well as addressing the rebalancing of national and global economies.”29(p6)

While the 2012 World Bank Jobs Report mentions social protection schemes, it consistently states that these cannot compromise labour market dynamism. Through the use of a powerful “cliff” metaphor, this excerpt illustrates the polarized viewpoints that continually plague global labour policy.

“Labor policy should avoid two cliffs: the distortionary interventions that clog the creation of jobs (emphasis added) in cities and in global value chains, and the lack of mechanisms for voice and protection for the most vulnerable workers (emphasis added), regardless of whether they are wage earners. The first cliff undermines the development payoffs from agglomeration and global integration; the second leads to low living standards and a social cohesion deficit..... Policies should remove the market imperfections and institutional failures that prevent the private sector from creating more good jobs for development.”31(p22-3)
Interventions such as active labour programs are characterized in this excerpt as distortionary because they provide work disincentives, in contrast to other perspectives aimed at protecting workers against market fluctuations and the power of employers. This text singles out the most vulnerable workers rather than stating that all workers have the right to voice and protection (a central tenet of decent work). In context, the Bank’s president stated in his address to the ILO: “While some have suggested that the Bank should only focus on the poorest, I think that would fail to provide our service as a true multilateral institution.”

While health equity is implicit, which sub-groups to target is a topic of debate depending on which actor is influencing the policy agenda and their interest in profit making. This contested issue led us to further explore who is in ‘charge’ of decent work including the role of individual responsibility for decent work.

2.6.5 Relative emphasis on individual versus collective responsibility for decent work

All texts call for increased collaboration between international institutions, governments, workers and employers to promote workers’ well-being. The divergence stems from what is emphasized and who is responsible. Some texts are more silent on the structural root causes of social and material deprivation resulting from work that is not fair. Instead, factors that affect an individual’s opportunity to access a fair job are emphasized. A closer reading also revealed evidence of the discourse of individual responsibility for decent work. This framing is rooted in a discourse of labour as commodity skewed in favour of letting markets decide without protective and enforceable policy measures. While the ILO states in its 1919 constitution that “labour is not a commodity”, this explicit language was not found in any texts analyzed. The discourse of “individual responsibility” functions by making claims about “personal development” and “people’s aspirations”, which we argue extends to making individuals responsible for aspiring and accessing decent work. As the following quote illustrates, the underlying logic for a claim about individual responsibility reflects a perspective in which rational, independent and entrepreneurial citizens are responsible for taking care of themselves.
“Combining the objectives of preventing poverty and protecting against social risks, thus empowering individuals to seize opportunities for decent employment and entrepreneurship...”

In other texts, the discourse of individual responsibility is more implicit. The 2009 ILO/WHO Social Protection Floor document makes several references to human empowerment (including gender dimensions), and empowering excluded groups. For instance, “[the social protection floor] aims to protect those who are unable to earn a decent income through employment and to empower workers to seize economic opportunities and work their way out of poverty.”

Taken in isolation, the language refers to “empowering workers” to take individual responsibility without explicit acknowledgement of the socio-cultural and economic circumstances that disadvantage workers from doing so in the first place. In summary, our findings point to the implicit and explicit presence and juxtaposition of health, economic, and health equity framings of decent work, which are enabled or silenced by broader discourses.

2.7 Discussion

Studies on work and health have largely focused on understanding the associations and causal connections between biological pathways and the social and environmental working conditions that produce ill health. However, research has not sufficiently examined how issues such as decent work are conceptualized nor has it adequately considered the relationship of these different conceptualizations to health and health equity. We assert that language and definitions do matter - what is taken up or not in policy texts can influence how decent work comes to be understood and acted upon by global actors. This also matters for health - daily living and working conditions can improve people’s chances to achieve their full health potential. As our findings suggest, a decision to use one term (jobs) over another (decent work) reinforces broader discourses regarding who is ‘in charge’ of the work agenda (i.e. markets, individual workers). Drawing on Foucault, other scholars have shown how this re-conceptualization of the social in
economic terms enables markets to turn individuals into “enterprising selves”, and takes the onus off governments, other regulatory bodies and even markets for protecting individual health.\textsuperscript{39}

Foucault suggests that discourses and social practices are varied, and there are only relative accepted truths operating within a system of cultural norms and therefore no overarching totality.\textsuperscript{25,40} Some discourses are enabled by making resources for constructing what is meant by a concept more available while making other possibilities less available.\textsuperscript{41} Our findings point to the language of economics as a disciplinary and regulatory power and its role as a normalizing discourse maintained by privileged groups.\textsuperscript{25} This discourse is influenced by neoliberal economic globalization, which has been demonstrated to permeate the thinking of the World Bank and UN agencies such as the WHO.\textsuperscript{16} Rushton and Williams argue that the dominance of the neoliberal discourse “colonizes” global health efforts.\textsuperscript{42} Neoliberalism in global health governance has deep roots in a broader project spanning “at least three decades during which health and other areas of social policy have been subjected to… the privileging of market-based responses, commodification and individualization of responsibility for health.”\textsuperscript{42(p163)} Our findings support these authors’ assertion. This neoliberal discourse also creates the conditions for deregulating labour and financial markets.\textsuperscript{16} The policies of the World Bank as a global financial institution and as a global norm-setter are impacted by neoliberal policies, which can have profound implications for workers’ ability to access equitable and healthy working conditions. The World Bank’s use of poverty reduction strategies has been called a form of regulatory power to govern the behaviour of others at a distance, which also echoes our findings about encouraging individual responsibility for decent work.\textsuperscript{27}

A shift in the ILO framing to a more World Bank framing of decent work especially following the 2008-2009 economic crisis elevates and reinforces the relative position of economic solutions for improving working conditions. The changing framing has implications for policy. Scholars have asserted that the current system of global governance does not adequately protect the public’s health, especially the most vulnerable populations.\textsuperscript{5} Policies that are intended to protect workers’ health, while important, can offer limited solutions for action on decent work. Competing belief systems influence what gets taken up through policy especially when there is
no consensus on how best to achieve a balance between social and economic measures in promoting decent work. Although a landmark analysis of 190 country labour policies concluded that the creation of a global floor for decent working conditions can be realized without detrimentally affecting the global competitiveness of countries, conflicting claims continue to be advanced.\(^2\) Our CDA findings contribute evidence on how such claims permeate several texts.

Returning to the notion that global institutions securitize work through policy to maintain social order, our analysis shows that this is indeed the case respecting decent work. While the Agenda attempts to normalize what constitutes decent work, other forces produce dominant discourses with their own logics and claims, which compete or silence other discourses. As our findings suggest, the need to put health on the agenda of workplaces can crowd out or silence other relevant agendas (e.g. DW Agenda). Policy instruments operate as rhetorical and normative modes of discourse intended to convince others to take action.\(^43\) While the DW Agenda has been adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council (2006) and other bodies as a policy instrument for achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, we conclude that decent work remains a contested notion and more than one ‘agenda’ is operating. In an era of globalization when “contested institutional and actor experimentation is more likely,”\(^44\) this is not surprising.

While the ILO has been characterized to have “embodied a systematic attempt to circumvent the labour market” and acted as an “institutional device to reduce the commodity character of labour relationships”, it has also been criticized for adopting a more narrow definition of work that equates the achievement of full employment with being employed in a job.\(^45,46(p358)\) Given the ILO’s tri-partite structure, views of what decent work means by its governance structure are likely conflicted.\(^47\) Other scholars have also called for an expansion of the decent work concept that extends beyond work as an economic occupation and set of social relations. They argue for a more nuanced analysis of the activity of work based upon the subjective investment that people make in their work to determine whether, for instance, the work experience is a decent one or not.\(^48\) These calls for an expanded conceptualization of decent work could help redress the
imbalance between economic and social framings of work to ensure that health and health equity considerations remain at the forefront.

The study has several limitations. Due to resource constraints, the analysis focused on a total of 10 policy texts. The greater number of ILO texts compared to the WHO and World Bank, and the small number of texts overall limit our ability to draw more conclusive statements about the differences between texts from these institutions. Therefore, this analysis only reveals some possible conceptualizations of decent work. The range in document lengths can limit the extent of comparability between texts; however, the strength of the discourse analysis method is not to account for the frequency of a given concept but rather to deepen understanding of how these concepts are reinforced through logics and claims within texts. We acknowledge like Fairclough that there are many ways to analyze discourses and therefore related findings can be subject to multiple interpretations. However, through its application, CDA helps to challenge the status quo and what might otherwise be taken for granted about concepts such as decent work and policy agendas such as the DW Agenda. While our findings may have limited generalizability to other contexts, they provide a sense of how decent work is taken up or not within policy texts. We call for further research that extends our understanding of how a complex phenomenon like work is discursively shaped and re-interpreted through the power relations between different global institutions.

Post-2008-2009 economic crisis, a great deal of uncertainty faces global institutions which must compete for reduced resources and demonstrate added value and impact. These conditions create a climate of self-interest, although greater cooperation and altruism are needed more than ever to raise the global floor for all workers. By issuing the “social protection floor for a fair and inclusive globalization” in 2011, the ILO re-purposed the Agenda as a solution to the most recent economic crisis. The World Bank’s World Development Report (WDR) on Jobs accounts for the health and social considerations of work but does so without fully adopting the tenets of the DW Agenda. In its response to this Report, the ILO concluded “the WDR paves the way for the Bank to align itself with the endorsement of the ILO DW Agenda by the UN and many other international organizations and thus promote enhanced policy coherence.”

While
opportunism and good will are necessary, it remains to be seen whether political action to improve working conditions post-financial crisis can be sustained or whether they will further exacerbate health and gender inequities. Of note, there appears to be some rapprochement between economic growth and decent work, as the draft post-2015 sustainable development goal #8 suggests: “to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”\textsuperscript{51} In the words of the former ILO President, Juan Somavia, “normative action is an indispensable tool to make decent work a reality.”\textsuperscript{52} As this CDA has sought to reveal, competition between health equity, health and economic claims underpinning different global work agendas and vested institutional interests about how to best achieve decent work for all may actually continue to undermine efforts to do so.
### 2.7.1 Table 1: Policy texts analyzed by selection criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text (alphabetical by institutional author and chronological by year)</th>
<th>Central to advancement of the Decent Work Agenda and/or has a particular focus on social protection</th>
<th>Describes critical events/activities relevant to understanding the context in which the ILO and its Decent Work Agenda operate</th>
<th>Represents inter-textual chains</th>
<th>Is expected to represent a deviant manifestation of the Decent Work Agenda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ILO Decent Work Agenda (launched in 1999)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting policy coherence for decent work and full, productive employment (prepared in collaboration with OECD for G20 Meeting of Labour and Employment Ministers) (ILO, 2011)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Work Initiative website (IFC (part of World Bank Group)/ILO) (2009)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint WHO/ILO UNAIDS policy guidelines for improving health workers' access to HIV and TB prevention, treatment, care and support services (guidance note) (2010)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO/WHO Social Protection Floor: for a fair and inclusive globalization (2011)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank Group President, Robert B. Zoellick at the International Labour Organization (March 17th, 2008 Address)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannes Summit Communiqué &amp; Cannes Action Plan for Growth and Jobs (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2.7.2 Table 2: Frequency of use of decent work, Decent Work Agenda and job terms

The table summarizes the frequency of use of decent work, Decent Work Agenda and job terms in all ten documents included in the analysis. ILO documents are listed first followed by documents produced by the ILO with other organizations or with explicit references to the ILO, followed by the remaining documents by the WHO and World Bank. The count excludes table of contents, headers, footnotes/endnotes and references. If the term was included in the title of the document, it was only counted once.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Text</th>
<th>Decent work</th>
<th>Decent Work Agenda</th>
<th>Job/Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Labour Organization (ILO) Decent Work Agenda (launched in 1999) (2 pages)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting policy coherence for decent work and full, productive employment (prepared in collaboration with OECD for G20 Meeting of Labour and Employment Ministers) (ILO, 2011) (11 pages)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22 (only 3 are qualified as needing to be quality or good jobs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Work Initiative website (IFC/ILO) (2009) (4 pages)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint WHO/ILO UNAIDS policy guidelines for improving health workers’ access to HIV and TB prevention, treatment, care and support services (guidance note) (2010) (34 pages)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO/WHO Social Protection Floor: for a fair and inclusive globalization (2011) (150 pages)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22 (4 are qualified with term decent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank Group President, Robert B. Zoellick at the ILO (March 17th, 2008 Address) (2 pages)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Text</td>
<td>Decent work</td>
<td>Decent Work Agenda</td>
<td>Job/Jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO Workers’ health: Global Plan of Action (2007) (12 pages)</td>
<td>0 (43 references to workers’ health)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cannes Summit Communiqué (2011) &amp; Cannes Action Plan for Growth and Jobs (2011) (7 pages)</td>
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### 2.7.3 Table 3: Summary of key findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Finding</th>
<th>Frames</th>
<th>Examples from Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health equity principles related to work are more explicitly present in ILO and WHO policy texts.</td>
<td>Health equity, Right to health</td>
<td>Guaranteeing workers’ rights explicitly mentioned in DW Agenda (ILO, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decent work is expressed in health and health equity terms through national policies that promote rights and social protection schemes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Activities related to workers’ health should be planned… with a view to reducing inequalities in workers’ health within and between countries (WHO, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The language of economics and market-based solutions permeates several policy texts analyzed.</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Health as a prerequisite for productivity and economic development (WHO, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid distortionary interventions that clog the creation of jobs (WB, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Finding</td>
<td>Frames</td>
<td>Examples from Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A shift in the ILO framing to a more World Bank framing of decent work following the 2008-09 economic crisis reinforces the relative position of economic solutions for improving working conditions.</td>
<td>Economic, Market-based</td>
<td>Promote core labour standards that support the economic and jobs recovery (ILO, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of ‘jobs’ over ‘decent work’ reinforces broader discourses regarding who is ‘in charge’ of the work agenda (i.e. markets, individual workers).</td>
<td>Economic, market-based Personal responsibility for work</td>
<td>“Empower workers to seize economic opportunities and work their way out of poverty.” (WHO/ILO, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>WB establishes early on that many job agendas exist (2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.8 References


16. Navarro V. Neoliberalism as a class ideology; or, the political causes of the growth of inequalities. Int J Health Serv. 2007;37(1):47-62.


Chapter 3
The politics of agenda setting at the global level: Key informant interviews regarding the International Labour Organization Decent Work Agenda

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3.1 Abstract

Background: Global labour markets continue to undergo significant transformations resulting from socio-political instability combined with rises in structural inequality, employment insecurity, and poor working conditions. Confronted by these challenges, global institutions are providing policy guidance to protect and promote the health and well-being of workers. This article provides an account of how the International Labour Organization’s Decent Work Agenda contributes to the work policy agendas of the World Health Organization and the World Bank.

Methods: This qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews with representatives from three global institutions – the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization and the World Bank. Of the 25 key informants invited to participate, 16 took part in the study. Analysis for key themes was followed by interpretation using selected agenda setting theories.

Results: Interviews indicated that through the Decent Work Agenda, the International Labour Organization is shaping the global policy narrative about work among UN agencies, and that the pursuit of decent work and the Agenda were perceived as important goals with the potential to promote just policies. The Agenda was closely linked to the World Health Organization’s conception of health as a human right. However, decent work was consistently identified by
World Bank informants as ILO terminology in contrast to terms such as job creation and job access. The limited evidence base and its conceptual nature were offered as partial explanations for why the Agenda has yet to fully influence other global institutions. Catalytic events such as the economic crisis were identified as creating the enabling conditions to influence global work policy agendas.

Conclusions: Our evidence aids our understanding of how an issue like decent work enters and stays on the policy agendas of global institutions, using the Decent Work Agenda as an illustrative example. Catalytic events and policy precedents were found to contribute positively to agenda setting. Questions remain, however, across key informants about the robustness of the underlying evidence base for this Agenda and what meaningful impacts have been realized on the ground as a result.

Keywords: Policy, Agenda setting, Work, International agencies, Qualitative research

3.2 Introduction

Global labour markets continue to undergo significant changes as part of globalization. These transformations range from greater access to technological advancements that hold the potential to improve the quality of people’s lives to increases in employment opportunities. Recent decades are also marked by transformations resulting from socio-political instability combined with rises in structural inequality, employment insecurity, and poor working conditions.¹ In response to these profound changes, some global institutions use policy instruments to encourage multiple actors to improve decent working conditions. In the context of globalization, global institutions operate in an increasingly complex and contested space. Given the recent economic
crisis, scholars are calling for greater attention to the effective functioning of global institutions.\textsuperscript{2} The capacity, power and actions of these actors – and their interactions – offer a “site” for understanding the evolution and regulation of work globally.\textsuperscript{1} Among global institutions, one can study horizontal policy agenda setting processes – how they mutually influence each other to set agendas and what value they contribute to the policy process. One such global institution, the International Labour Organization (ILO), has a mandate to promote social justice and internationally recognized human rights, specifically those in relation to labour. Established in 1919, the ILO was originally envisioned as an “instrument of international social reform” and a “scientific and impartial body” independent of states.\textsuperscript{3} The ILO includes tripartite representation from employers, workers and state representatives, which according to the ILO provides it with “an edge in incorporating real world knowledge about employment and work” into the policy development process.\textsuperscript{4}

The purpose of this article is to provide a qualitative account of how the ILO Decent Work Agenda contributes to the work policy agendas of two other institutions – the World Health Organization (WHO), which like the ILO operates within the UN system, and the World Bank (WB), which is not formally part of the UN system. It discusses the results from key informant interviews conducted with the ILO, the WHO and World Bank representatives, which shed light on the processes that contribute or hinder policy agenda setting. The results point to the need for institutions such as the ILO to be nimble and adaptive to events and to a shifting global, political and economic context, in order to influence policy agendas that promote workers’ well-being.
We start with a brief description of the evolution of the Decent Work Agenda and theoretical approaches to agenda setting. After describing the methods, we set out our findings under key themes emerging from the interviews. We discuss these in light of selected theoretical approaches to agenda setting, and share implications of our findings and potential future directions.

3.3 Background

3.3.1 ILO Decent Work Agenda in an era of globalization

In 1999, the ILO launched the Decent Work Agenda (DWA or simply the Agenda) to guide the development of policy that aims to protect and promote workers’ well-being around the globe. The Agenda encourages all nations to offer women and men the opportunity to work in freedom, equity, security and human dignity. ILO defines decent work as the sum of the aspirations of people for “opportunity and income; rights, voice and recognition; family stability and personal development; and, fairness and gender equality.” Through the Agenda, the ILO seeks to ensure that workers have equal access to work that is safe, secure, sustainable and productive, respects a person's fundamental rights at work and provides the freedom to voice one’s concerns. The ILO asserts that these objectives can only be achieved through “decent work-oriented approaches to economic and social policy in partnership with the principal institutions and actors of the multilateral system and the global economy.”
Decent work matters in terms of health. Work that is not decent can produce significant adverse health effects through material and social deprivation and unsafe working conditions. Work-related accidents or diseases account for more than 2.3 million deaths per year, and 317 million accidents, which in turn result in many absences. The related human and economic costs are estimated at 4% of the global Gross Domestic Product each year. Studies are also showing that work intensification and non-standard employment (e.g. informal work) are linked to poor health and social outcomes. Decent work is also not equally and equitably accessible to all individuals, communities or nations. The effects of globalization provide a partial explanation. The current form of globalization has been characterized as “not a natural or inevitable fact but a series of deliberate decisions that disproportionately favour some over others.” Globalization transcends national boundaries to affect health in several ways. A growing body of evidence suggests that it is “giving rise to new patterns of health and disease linked to the consequent restructuring of human societies.” It is transforming socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions and contributing to the reconfiguration of existing health challenges, including health inequalities within and between countries. In the face of the most recent economic crisis, the now former ILO’s Director General, Juan Somavia denounced the “structural imbalances of the current model of globalization….a model that during the last three decades has overvalued the role of the market, devalued the role of government, and diminished the dignity of work and respect for the environment.”

The ILO has tried to promote decent work through the policy process. Since the launch of the Decent Work Agenda in 1999, the ILO has, for instance, raised awareness of the importance of decent work through the UN, G20 and other global fora, disseminated policy documents (e.g.
Social Protection Floor Initiative), and provided technical guidance on topics such as promising employment and social policies that promote decent work conditions.12 That said, these efforts have not been without their challenges. Heymann and Earle assert that “not everyone believes that we have a strong obligation to ensure a minimum floor of working conditions and equal opportunity for all human beings.”13 We must interrogate the discursive root causes of such policy perspectives. In particular, how can a policy instrument such as the Decent Work Agenda contribute to both workers’ well-being and to fair globalization by, as the ILO has framed it, “harnessing [its] benefits while promoting sustainable economic and social development”?14

3.3.2 Agenda setting

The study of agenda setting processes deepens our understanding of how an issue such as decent work lands on the policy agendas of global institutions in the first place. The study of agenda setting involves asking how health and social problems emerge and stay on the policy agenda, how policy makers become aware of these problems, how attention and resources are allocated to these problems, and how agendas are set and produced through political interactions of social actors.15-17 Language and practices shape, legitimize and support policy agendas in discourses and interactions between organizations.

Kingdon argues that “agenda setting has a random character in which problems, policies and politics flow along [three] independent streams.”16 He further suggests that only once there is convergence across the three streams (problems, policies, and politics) can a problem or issue
emerge on the policy agenda. Other scholars, such as Baumgartner and Jones, have argued that agenda setting implies “no one” single equilibrium in politics. Rather it is characterized by stability and rapid transformation. In periods of stability, agenda setting is a more integral part of the policy process, more incremental in nature and more likely influenced by precedents (e.g. past policy solutions, long-standing collaborative agreements between organizations).

Agenda setting can also be marked by periods of volatile change. Catalytic events (e.g. economic crisis) provoke disruptions in the policy equilibrium and can lead policy makers and politicians to pay greater attention to the problems highlighted by these events and can trigger convergence between problems, policies and politics. Agenda access also comes into play in periods of stability and change. Taken together, these insights from the literature point to different processes that might explain how policy agendas are established, in the first place, and then mobilized through the actions of institutions. Although the focus has shifted away from linear and incremental descriptions towards approaches that recognize the iterative and dynamic nature of agenda setting processes, less is known about how health and social issues get and stay on the policy agendas of global institutions, and how organizations influence each other to set global policy. Global institutions and the interactions between them provide an important site of study for understanding the latter horizontal policy agenda setting processes. Our study attempts to shed light on the processes at work in policy agenda setting using the Decent Work Agenda as an illustrative example.
3.4 Methods

This article reports the results from sixteen semi-structured interviews with representatives from three global institutions – the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank. These organizations were chosen because of their major policy leadership around work, health and/or economic development, respectively. The interviews aimed to identify how these three organizations contribute to policy agenda setting and to document the forms of knowledge, social norms, rules and claims (e.g. economic, social, health), which affect different organizations’ conceptualizations of decent work.

3.4.1 Recruitment

A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit 5–6 representatives per organization to examine a diversity of perspectives within and across the ILO, the WHO and World Bank. These key informants (KIs) were chosen on the basis of their ability to provide relevant insights about the topic under study. The following selection criteria were used to select KIs: 1) individuals with exposure to the topic and content expertise about decent work and/or labour policy; 2) individuals in the WHO and World Bank with an established relationship to the ILO, including those who collaborate or operate at the interface of their organization and the ILO, or have some knowledge of this relationship (e.g. individuals who have worked on a joint policy document with the ILO); and, 3) individuals who work at different policy and program levels within each organization. Prior to recruitment, ethics approval was sought from and granted by the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto (Health Sciences Research Ethics Board).
A total of twenty-five individuals were invited to participate by e-mail between October 2011 and May 2012 using a standard recruitment letter, which included information about the study and the consent form. Some participants were already known to the lead author based on preliminary consultations with two of the three organizations at the study design stage. Others were identified through a combination of referral and snowballing techniques following the conduct of initial interviews. Of the twenty-five contacted, sixteen people agreed to take part in the study. Some challenges were encountered with participant recruitment. Some individuals did not respond despite several follow-up attempts by email and phone or they declined to participate either because they did not have the time due to competing commitments, overseas travel and/or organizational restructuring, or they did not feel they were the ‘right person’ (i.e. had insufficient knowledge to contribute to study; did not feel their organization could comment on decent work issues). Those who declined were encouraged to recommend others to participate, and in some cases, they suggested someone else within their organization.

Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted in person in Geneva (ILO, WHO) and Washington D.C. (World Bank), and the remaining five by phone between November 2011 and May 2012. Six from the ILO, five from the World Bank and five from the WHO took part. A total of 9 men and 7 women participated. Interview participants had worked in their current organization (but not necessarily in their current position) from two to 28 years. KIs represented different disciplinary backgrounds (e.g. occupational health, labour economics, social policy, gender and development), held positions at different levels (from junior positions to senior management) and performed different roles (e.g. technical specialists; partnerships, policy and research roles).
3.4.2 Data collection

A semi-structured approach was used to explore common issues while allowing for topics of relevance to emerge from key informants’ interests or experiences during the interviews. This approach to interviewing provided each KI the chance to describe and frame issues from their perspective and permit the emergence of ideas that are outside of the researcher’s own theoretical framework. Table 1 provides examples of core questions from the interview guide, which was adapted for use with each organization (see Appendices C and D for complete interview guides). Interviews ranged in length from 40 to 75 minutes and were all conducted in English. The interviews covered topics such as individual and organizational perspectives on decent work, global influences on decent work policy, perceived meanings of the Decent Work Agenda, involvement and ownership in the Agenda, as well as its current and future relevance. The same investigator (lead author) conducted all interviews to enhance consistency. All participants were encouraged to recommend others within or from another organization that was part of the study. Data collection was completed following exhaustion of all recruitment options, that is after no other participants could be identified through referrals or snowballing techniques.

Sample Interview Questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Illustrative Probes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Perspectives on decent work</td>
<td>How is decent work important to you/your organization?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does decent work mean to you/your organization?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How was it decided that the term “decent work” should be used by your organization?</td>
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<td>When did this occur? Why do you think this happened?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decent Work Agenda</td>
<td>Who owns the Decent Work Agenda? Has this changed since it was first in launched in 1999? How?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Who else supports the Decent Work Agenda? Why?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Who might oppose the Agenda? Why?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Looking ahead, what role do you see the Decent Work Agenda playing in the next five years?</td>
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3.4.3 Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, validated against the recording, and the data stored in a password protected location. Interview data were coded using ATLAS.ti 6.2 qualitative data management software. A preliminary hermeneutic unit and coding scheme were constructed, informed by the study research questions. Codes were generated through a combination of very descriptive (close to the data) codes and more conceptual ones informed by the literature. Using an iterative process, codes were eliminated and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify overall patterns in the data. Then links were made to the study research questions and relevant literature on agenda setting and policy (see Appendix B). By analyzing participant accounts thematically, similarities and differences could be contrasted in order to provide a better understanding of the nature of collaboration, policy agenda setting processes, and contributions of each of these to the setting of work policy agendas at a global level.

3.5 Findings

The themes identified herein reflect enabling and unsupportive agenda setting influences that relate to the saliency of decent work and the perceived sense of ownership in the Agenda, the nature of collaboration, congruence and coherence of different organizational policy agendas, and the role of catalytic events. Together, they shed light on the role of the Decent Work Agenda (DWA) in setting the global policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank. They also unpack the
nature of the interactions between these three organizations, and point to influences of the socio-political and organizational context in which the Decent Work Agenda is operating.

### 3.5.1 Saliency of decent work

The interviews identified that through the DWA, the ILO is shaping the global policy narrative about work and therefore setting this global agenda. There was general agreement among key informants from all three organizations that the pursuit of decent work and the Decent Work Agenda were laudable goals with the potential to promote just policies. The extent of agreement was even higher when a KI commented from an individual perspective.

“*Any normal human being would like everybody to have access to a decent job.... I guess the differences are more in terms of what needs to be done.*” (WB KI)

The Agenda was identified as a “leitmotif” that guides policy activity for the ILO in particular, a political text, a slogan or a sort of shorthand that could succinctly communicate concepts about decent work (ILO and WHO KIs). These included acceptable, respectable, adequate, healthy, safe, and dignified work relative to one’s local circumstances that provides a sense of purpose.

“*[Decent work] touches upon the core business of this organization, which is health.*” (WHO KI)

The decent work (DW) concept was also seen as more embracing of different work arrangements compared to the word ‘job’ (ILO KI). Inherent tensions such as decent work is supposed to
combine economic efficiency with social justice were mentioned by some KIs. In contrast, all World Bank KIs referred to decent work as “ILO’s terminology” and consistently reported not using it. Instead, they used terms such as good and quality jobs, better work, job creation, job access and equal opportunities for jobs. Several WB KIs noted that because 80% of work is informal especially in developing countries, the definition of ‘decent’ in those conditions is very difficult to measure, let alone enforce. They consistently reported the Bank focusing on jobs as a means to reduce poverty:

“You first need to have a paid job; then, you can worry about it being formal and then you can worry about it being decent.” (WB KI)

Some WB informants did, however, remark that “good jobs may actually not be decent, according to the standard definition of decent employment from the ILO”. Some also noted that a few dimensions of the DW Agenda (social protection, employment) do map onto the Bank’s work-related programs (e.g. social protection, better work program, gender and development initiatives).

WHO informants identified the DW Agenda with the ILO and explicitly noted several points of congruence with their objectives. The Agenda was seen to be closely aligned with the WHO’s conception of health as a human right. A WHO KI identified a natural fit of fair employment and

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v These interviews were conducted before the public release of the World Bank’s 2013 World Development Report on Jobs in October 2012.
decent work with social determinants of health, health equity and health in all policies frameworks, which the WHO uses. Finally, the Agenda did influence to some extent the organization’s thinking in relation to human resources. It was identified as a “very useful point of reference” (WHO KI) to guide policy. It was also seen as carrying particular weight coming from a specialized agency (i.e. ILO) within the UN system.

3.5.2 Perceived sense of ownership

When asked who owns the Decent Work Agenda, all KIs pointed without hesitation to the ILO though in one instance the UN Chief Executive Board was also named. The ILO has carved out a distinctive niche through the Decent Work Agenda – it provides a reasonably coherent explanation of ILO objectives and a common platform for working with other international organizations. Organizational mandate was seen as inextricably linked to ownership as were the interests of key constituencies (e.g. member states, workers and employer organizations). Yet some ILO and WHO KIs reported that many agencies with whom they work can be extremely “territorial in trying to protect their niche”. This arises according to one informant because the DWA overlaps with ‘hot topics’ such as the social determinants of health, social protection, and the Millennium Development Goals where every agency is trying to put their spin on the global agenda and compete for political attention and resources. It can also manifest through an organization’s actions. In reference to the World Bank’s Jobs Development Report (note: only the report’s outline was publicly available at the time of these interviews), one ILO KI remarked:
“How come they wrote all that without saying decent work? ..... That’s sort of part of the problem that if you’re doing a flagship report at World Bank, you could have your own flag .... But the fact {is} that the intellectual content of the Decent Work Agenda is influencing the World Bank’s thinking.” (ILO KI)

3.5.3 Nature of collaboration

All informants reported some level of collaboration with the other two organizations in question with the greatest and most consistently reported collaboration between the ILO and the WHO. Reasons given included the fact that the ILO and the WHO are both formally part of the UN system, the role of historical precedents such as constitutional agreements, and the existence of collaborative structures such as joint technical steering committees or inter-agency initiatives (e.g. Social Protection Floor Initiative; Joint WHO/ILO/UNAIDS policy guide- lines for health care workers). Some KIs cited more recent examples of collaboration with the World Bank at the country level (e.g. sharing information about needs assessments) and declared states of emergency where the WB is acting as trustee of funds. This may suggest that the context for collaboration, and the potential for incremental change and mutual influence of agendas, is high.
3.5.4 Congruence between the ILO Decent Work Agenda and the organizational objectives of WHO and World Bank

Several KIs reported inherent tensions and trade-offs such as balancing social and market needs and the impacts of limited budgets on their organizations in trying to advance a common work agenda globally. Territorialism and turf battles characterize this dynamic and increasingly competitive and fiscally-constrained environment where global institutions need to redefine their core business and functions in relation to each other. While for some this took the form of disengagement (i.e. “decent work” is the ILO’s business), others readily reported common ground with the concept of decent work and the DWA. For instance, a WHO key informant reported the use of “health of workers’ or ‘workers’ health’ or also ‘occupational health’ not decent per se although they pursue the same goals as the ILO obviously, but on a different scale”. Another WHO KI noted the following:

“The big advantage [of the Decent Work Agenda] is the integration aspect, the fact that it does link right across the whole area of work...[for example] social protection, which the ILO’s always been very strong in...seeing how we linked social protection into other policies.”

Policy precedents affect whether an issue is considered a priority for an organization and how it is framed. For instance, some World Bank informants mentioned that the Bank did not always see labour as a big priority given interests in poverty reduction in developing countries. However, this is changing and opportunities for collaboration between the ILO and WB (e.g. social protection) are emerging.
“The ILO is more oriented to looking at the labour market and particularly the formal labour markets whereas the Bank’s emphasis is always, you know, the poor and this makes a bit of difference in the approach but, but I would say the relationship today is much more cooperative.” (WB KI)

There is evidence that the Decent Work Agenda also impacted agenda access, which occurs when an issue mobilizes greater numbers of constituencies. Some KIs reported ignoring the Agenda or parts of it because they were not convinced that it was grounded in robust evidence. For example, from an organizational perspective, some World Bank informants noted having difficulty engaging with the workers' rights agenda (which is one of the four core strategic areas of the DWA). However, they went on to report that in cases where there is empirical economic evidence suggesting that decent work is good for development and long-term growth rates, and has quantifiable economic impacts, then it can be supported. The example given was that of child labour, which had been empirically shown according to one informant to reduce human capital development.

“Within the Bank Group, very, very little focus on any of the rights aspects to jobs, for sure. It’s all viewed through a lens of what promotes development.” (WB KI)

3.5.5 Policy coherence

Several ILO and WHO informants highlighted how the DW Agenda contributed to greater policy coherence within the family of United Nations (UN) Agencies. WHO informants commended
the ILO for continually raising the issue of decent work with the Chief Executive Board, where all heads of UN agencies come together. The ILO’s persistence in navigating global governance mechanisms such as the “UN system-wide Coherence Process” led to the successful adoption of the DW Agenda by more than 30 affiliated Agencies. vi KIs also noted several policy documents and declarations that reiterate the key messages of the DW Agenda. However, a frequently cited limitation of “decent work” and the Decent Work Agenda’s discursive role across all three organizations was that it has remained too conceptual, that it is difficult to measure, that it lacks a robust evidence base (in particular economic evidence), and that it has yet to result in a completely coherent, comprehensive policy strategy. In one ILO informant’s view, this policy rhetoric had absolutely no impact. According to one WB informant, this is a matter of political economy. At a national level, a complex set of multi-level policies need to be coordinated to create and improve access to good quality jobs yet there is very limited communication between the different ministries managing them. The policies include macro-economic policies that affect investments, labour regulations, passive and active labour market programs, education policies that affect the distribution and the supply of skills, and policies dealing with social protection. The lack of communication and coordination pose challenges for increasing the quality and quantity of jobs that are business friendly and open to and benefit the majority of workers.

According to both ILO and WB informants, more sensitive indicators were felt to be needed that extended beyond just employment and unemployment rates to include ‘softer’ indicators (e.g. the relationship between work and social cohesion was seen as less direct). The limited evidence

vi http://www.undg.org/content/about_the_undg/undg_members. Note that the World Bank has observer status while the ILO and WHO are members.
base was offered as a partial explanation for why the DW Agenda has yet to really influence policy-making at the country level. In contrast, some informants (WB, WHO) highlighted one of the many conundrums faced by global institutions in setting national and local policy agendas.

“We are supposed to set norms and standards…” “Our role is ... to work through the regions and countries to implement those norms and standards and work with them on pilot demonstration projects ... and so, sort of by definition, we are removed from the real impact of our work at the ground level.” (WHO KI)

3.5.6 Catalytic events

KIs mentioned catalytic events, which can create windows of opportunity and enabling political, economic and social conditions for influencing policy agendas. The arrival of a new leader, Juan Somavia at the ILO back in 1999, led to the introduction of the DW Agenda and its approval by the ILO Governing Body and at the Conference. The Organization then adopted decent work as a modern version of its historical mandate. More recently, the global economic crisis and related consequences also had a catalytic effect. The ILO capitalized on this window of opportunity by working with the G20 to put decent work back on the agenda of these countries, as substantiated by these informant quotes:

“… In 2008, the labour conference adopted the ILO Global Jobs Pact which is a menu of options, of policies that have proved to work well in the situation of crisis response but also in ...
a normal situation. So the recent economic crisis, the Global Jobs Pact did sort of this for the Decent Work Agenda but translated [it] into sort of a crisis response package.” (ILO KI)

“What’s happened with the first crisis of globalization and the recognition that in that boom period before the bust, employment wasn’t growing that well, even in the good times, and now in the bad times it’s serious trouble... I think there is recognition that, you know, we can’t just sort of cross our fingers and hope that other forces will create the conditions which enable decent jobs to be fostered. We’ve actually got to do it in a much more integrated way with employment. Much more near the heart of the economic thinking! And that’s been the biggest change in the last few years.” (ILO KI)

“I think the most recent work at the G20 level was really important to highlight the necessity to work on these aspects, but it was probably not enough because for the time being, the G20 are considering decent work as important probably because of the crisis context, but decent work is of course not only a crisis concept, ... it is a concept that should apply to all situations ...”. (ILO KI)

3.6 Discussion

Study results point to evidence of agenda setting regarding the Decent Work Agenda. These include evidence of: saliency of decent work as an issue worthy of pursuit; congruence between
the Agenda and the organizational objectives of others (e.g. fit between decent work and social determinants of health and health as a human right); and, policy coherence through shaping of policy discourses and practices. For instance, KI data suggest that policy coherence has in part been enabled by organizational precedents, joint collaborative structures and endorsements by influential bodies such as the UN Chief Executive Board and the G20. These processes have contributed to putting decent work on the agendas of these global institutions and governance mechanisms. Fundamental to an understanding of agenda setting is knowledge of vested interests and how these are shaped by organizational ideologies and values and can lead to resistance. A key theme arising is the World Bank’s resistance to the language of ‘decent work,’ at least in part because it is perceived to conflict with market imperatives. They also seem to resist any parts of a rights framework that they do not perceive to be based on evidence, further suggesting a more ideological component to their position. The World Bank’s decision to not adopt the language of the Decent Work Agenda could be interpreted as an attempt to redefine the discourse of work and exert their power and influence to occupy this policy space internationally. Regardless of what WB KIs might say, indeed, the Bank’s policies in labour market flexibility (including unrestricted international flows of labour) actually conflict with the promotion of decent work conditions. For example, the WB key informant’s assertion that countries must get their people to have paid work first, then informal employment and then formal employment is not consistent with the global evidence base. Benach and colleagues documented the opposite in poor countries where the shift away from informal to formal employment did not occur; instead, there was often a growth in informal employment.
That said, the ILO’s long-standing focus on improving decent working conditions may have indirectly raised the profile of labour issues within the WB over time, and ultimately led to its 2013 World Development Report on Jobs.25 While some progress has been made, questions remain according to KIs across all three organizations about the robustness of the underlying evidence base for the DW Agenda and also what impacts have been realized on the ground as a result. This limited impact is perhaps not surprising in the case of organizations such as the ILO who establish agendas that conflict with dominant thinking, including the neoliberal discourses of more powerful agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Over the last fifteen years, the ILO Decent Work Agenda, labour standards and conventions have been incorporated into various UN and country-level policy documents, guidelines and agreements. They are, however, an excluded component of WTO agreements or rulings.26 This is despite efforts of the ILO to work with the WTO and IMF on technical reports to highlight links between social and trade policy that influence decent work. Furthermore, countries first need to establish their own legally binding social policy to enshrine these agreed-upon conventions into legislative commitments, and second, countries are only required to self-report on their implementation to the ILO. This leads to inconsistent and incomplete reporting by countries, and limited knowledge is available about the extent to which countries are adhering to policies that promote decent working conditions on the ground.13

Kingdon argued that only once there is convergence across the problems, policies and politics streams can a problem or an issue emerge on the policy agenda.16 We suggest that convergence across these three streams has not quite occurred at the global level. The evidence base for problems is debated, policies are multiple and complex and diverse organizational
interests challenge organizations to sustain attention on health and social issues. For example, the complex set of macro-economic, labour, social, and education policies that must be coordinated to promote workers’ well-being points to the political challenge of keeping this issue on the policy agenda in this globally contested space with a “high degree of pluralisation of actors and multiple and contested modes of authority than is usually the case at national levels of policy making.”

Achieving greater policy coherence and integration across diverse organizations remains an ongoing challenge in a social and political space shaped by the interactions between organizations with different agendas, values, assumptions, and operating under different rules. For example, the three organizations do not operate within the same multilateral system - the ILO and WHO do, whereas the World Bank does not. Global institutions need to stay nimble to take advantage of catalytic events that can mobilize attention towards issues with otherwise limited agenda access. These events can also provide opportunities to reframe the discourse about decent work where there is greater balance between socially-oriented objectives and market needs.

As Baumgartner and Jones observed, agenda setting can occur during periods of significant change brought on by catalytic events, which mobilize interests. Events such as the economic crisis helped to reignite concern and garner greater political attention toward decent work. They underscore that the pursuit of decent work does not have to be at odds with economic growth and development. Events create disruptions in the policy equilibrium and make agenda setting more
discernible from the overall policy development process, in contrast to periods of stability when it is difficult to separate out agenda setting from the policy-making process. Events lead to the identification of windows of opportunity when agenda setting processes can best be studied. It remains to be seen whether the agenda setting effects of disruptions in the policy equilibrium, such as the recent economic crisis, can be sustained to further benefit workers’ health and well-being. The dominant normalized discourse that markets always know best continues to challenge the legitimacy and policy effects of many organizations in the global policy arena. Such a perspective privileges market-based solutions where nothing in theory is free from commodification - workers are commodities (i.e. goods and services to be purchased) and the policies enacted in their name act as instruments of commodification. 29

3.6.1 Limitations

The small number of participating organizations was a limitation of the study in that the results do not include potentially more diverse organizational perspectives that could also influence agenda setting related to decent work. These include other UN organizations and groups such as the international labour rights forum who support workers’ rights, but also non-governmental organizations and unions all advocating for decent working conditions or organizations and coalitions who may oppose these objectives. Further research is needed to elucidate other organizational perspectives and their influence on global agenda setting regarding decent work. The selection of key informants also presented some theoretical and methodological challenges. Informants can speak on their own accord as well as for the organizations they represent. 30 In this study, it was not always readily apparent from whose perspective KIs were speaking, despite
attempts to probe for distinctions. That said, informants did shed light on how the use of different language (e.g. decent work vs. good jobs) influences or not the policy agendas of their respective institutions. They were generally quite willing to talk about individual and organizational viewpoints on decent work and the DW Agenda.

The second limitation related to the timing of interviews, which were conducted when at least one participating organization was going through restructuring, while others were facing imminent changes in leadership. In addition, interviews were conducted before the October 2012 public release of the World Bank’s 2013 World Development Report on Jobs.25 These temporal factors influenced in some instances our ability to recruit participants and, to some extent, KIs’ ability to represent the most recent position of their organization.

3.7 Conclusion

In this article, we present the findings from 16 interviews with representatives from the ILO, WHO and World Bank regarding decent work and the Decent Work Agenda. Our evidence furthers understanding of how an issue like decent work can influence the policy agendas of global institutions, using the Decent Work Agenda as an illustrative example. In a nutshell, the findings tell us that agenda setting is related to: the saliency of decent work as an issue that is garnering attention and mobilizing interests especially after the economic crisis; increasing congruence between the Agenda and the organizational objectives of others; and, policy coherence. Despite the ILO’s strong and steady leadership and commitment to advance this
Agenda globally, we conclude that the DWA has not been wholly incorporated by the WHO and the World Bank although there is evidence of policy coherence at least within the UN context. Since 1999, agenda setting related to decent work has been realized incrementally and expressed through policy coherence enabled through formal global governance mechanisms (e.g. UN coherence system process), and through influence on the discourses and practices of individual organizations in particular the WHO.

Organizational precedents, joint collaborative structures and endorsements seem to positively support agenda setting. Catalytic events such as the recent economic crisis and organizations’ strategic response to them can lead to a potential paradigm shift away from the markets always knowing what is best towards social protection, sustainable development and fair globalization. Conversely, these catalytic events provide an impetus for how actors frame and reframe their messages about decent work (in this case) in relation to the global economic downturn. The global policy arena remains fluid and dynamic and is shaped by the emergence of new partnerships and initiatives, changes and catalytic events that affect and engage a plurality of actors. Efforts such as the Social Protection Floor Initiative and the more recent UN Platform for Monitoring the Social Determinants of Health or the arrival of a new leader at the ILO could each give new legs to the Decent Work Agenda. It remains to be seen whether the DWA will maintain its currency on the global policy agenda, take on different discursive forms in response to the changing sociopolitical context, and meaningfully contribute to improvements in working conditions globally.
3.8 References


Chapter 4 Public Health agenda setting in a global context: the case of the ILO Decent Work Agenda


4.1 Abstract

The study of agenda setting examines how issues get and stay on policy agendas. In this commentary, we draw on two agenda setting theories usually applied at state or national levels, to assess their utility at the global level: Kingdon’s multiple streams theory and Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory. We illustrate our analysis with findings from a qualitative study of the International Labour Organization’s Decent Work Agenda. We found that each theory helps unpack which agenda setting mechanisms operate in the global context, including how windows of opportunity open and what role institutions play as policy entrepreneurs. Future application of these theories could help characterize power struggles between global actors, whose voices are heard or silenced, and their impact on global policy agenda setting.

4.2 Introduction

Victor Hugo’s assertion that no one can resist “an idea whose time has come” still resonates today, but what factors contribute to making an idea timely?¹ Many public health issues from climate change to improving healthy working conditions all hold potential to garner political and public attention, to mobilize organizational interests, and surface on policy agendas. Yet these and other health and social issues continuously compete for legitimacy and resources in the policy process. Agenda setting has inspired much research, but somewhat less in the public
health field. Research has examined how such issues emerge to be considered as policies, how agendas are set and produced through the political interactions of social actors, how attention is maintained and resources are allocated to these problems. If agenda setting is about shifting us towards “what to think” by indicating “what to think about,” what are the real-world factors, who are the relevant actors, and which factors and actors really matter? We add what may be different about agenda setting processes in the global context?

Theories help scholars ‘unpack’ this contextual complexity to elucidate how and why issues get and stay on policy agendas, and identify the processes that drive these dynamics. This commentary assesses the utility of Kingdon’s multiple streams theory and Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory with respect to the study of global agenda setting with illustrative findings from a qualitative study about the International Labour Organization’s Decent Work Agenda. These theories are described, and selected attributes analyzed in terms of their applicability to the global policy agenda setting context. We conclude by critically reflecting on implications for future research and practice in public health policy.

4.3 The Decent Work Agenda

In 1999, the International Labour Organization (ILO) created the Decent Work Agenda (DWA) to encourage institutions and other actors to implement policies in support of decent work. Work that is not decent can have negative health and social effects through unsafe and unfair working conditions. To better understand the role the DWA has played in setting the work policy agendas of two other global institutions, we engaged in two lines of inquiry. The first involved sixteen interviews with ILO, World Health Organization (WHO), and World Bank representatives. Whereas the ILO advances social justice through the promotion of labour rights, the WHO is the authority for health within the UN system, and the World Bank seeks to alleviate extreme poverty and promote development through financial assistance. The second was a discourse analysis of ten publicly accessible policy texts published between 1998 and 2012 to
contrast health, economic, and social conceptualizations of decent work found in the work policy agendas of these institutions.10

4.3.1 Agenda setting

The theories of Kingdon1 and Baumgartner and Jones,5 have been primarily applied to understand agenda setting in a variety of policy contexts at the country level.1,5,11,12 However, Shiffman et al.13 used the punctuated equilibrium theory to examine the ups and downs in global attention to polio, tuberculosis, and malaria control. Kingdon’s theory has been used to conceptualize how different health and social problems emerge and stay on the agenda.14,11,12 He argued that agenda setting occurs where there is convergence of three streams – problems, policies and politics.1,11 When the streams converge, windows of opportunity open allow policy entrepreneurs to advance a solution to the problem.

Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory characterizes the policy context as relatively stable but punctuated by periods of instability and rapid transformation.5 How an issue is defined or framed is the “driving force in both periods of stability and instability” that can mobilize those previously not interested to suddenly pay attention to an issue.5 A period of stability and inattention towards an issue can be interrupted or punctuated by periods of dramatic change. Positive feedback loops are quick, with dramatic instances of diffusion and support for new political ideas replacing old ones. Their theory also emphasizes the role of events and precedents in explaining how policy agendas are changed. Events are usually limited in space and time but can have a mobilizing and destabilizing effect on what dominates policy discussions. Conversely, precedents can explain why an institution may operate in a policy arena or influence their likelihood of success.
4.3.2 Applying agenda setting theories in a global context

Kingdon’s theory of stream convergence and the consequent opening of a policy window applied at the global level. Our research on institutional conceptualizations of decent work suggests that the three streams of problems, policies and politics were indeed operating globally. The DWA was seen as meeting the institutional objectives of others such as the fit between decent work and social determinants of health and health as a human right in the case of the WHO.9

Further, Kingdon’s emphasis on problem definition and the role of defining events and institutional values applied well to our research on the DWA because we found that indecent work (the problem) was a contested notion shaped by different health, economic and social discourses,10 which were thought to arise through defining events (e.g. change in the ILO’s organizational leader, economic crisis) and institutional precedents (e.g. the long-standing mandate of the ILO in promoting safe, equitable and healthy working conditions). We also found that the WHO, ILO and the World Bank collaborated and competed with one another for the attention of decision-makers in national governments and other international institutions. Joint collaborative structures between the WHO and ILO and endorsements by influential bodies such as the UN Chief Executive Board and the G20, resulted from convergence of Kingdon’s three policy streams.9

We also found that policy entrepreneurs played an important role in agenda setting, although the policy entrepreneur in this case was an institution. According to Kingdon, policy entrepreneurs navigate in the politics sphere, promote ideas and invest time and resources that increase the chances for an idea to get on the agenda.1 Since 1999, the ILO leadership has acted as a collective “policy entrepreneur” and seized windows of opportunity building on years of efforts at global, national and sub-national levels (e.g. ILO offers technical assistance to support the implementation of decent work country programmes). Several informants noted that the DWA has been successfully adopted by more than 30 United Nations-affiliated agencies, as a result of the ILO’s policy entrepreneurial efforts.
The 2008-09 global economic crisis (an example of dramatic change) provided a momentous opportunity for the ILO to reframe decent work and mobilize attention towards unhealthy working conditions, which previously had limited agenda access. The ILO collaborated with the G20 (a decision-making authority) to promote policy coherence for decent work in direct response to this crisis. The response to the economic crisis is an example of punctuation in the equilibrium, with the G20 lending political support to promote decent work. The ILO seized this window of opportunity and, in so doing, elevated the Agenda’s status as a credible response to the crisis.

Although not central to our research on institutional conceptualizations of decent work, we acknowledge the influence of countries, private corporations, and civil society groups on what is advanced in the global policy arena. Through their informal and formal norms and social practices, powerful actors can steer or disrupt agendas, and amplify or silence institutional voices. Media and civil society actors trigger political action by building public pressure and opening up policy windows for change.

4.3.3 Agenda setting theories not applying as well globally

Kingdon’s empirical work is derived from how agenda setting unfolds primarily in the context of the U.S. and efforts to influence governmental policy agendas. As noted by Stone, the global context is better characterized as a social and political public space of “fluid, dynamic and intermeshed relations of politics, markets, culture and society that is generated by globalization and shaped by the interactions of its actors, some more visible, persuasive or powerful than others”. We found that the complex set of macro-economic, labour, social, and education policies that must be coordinated to promote workers’ well-being globally is a formidable challenge for institutions like the ILO trying to position decent work in this contested policy space. The ILO’s efforts are further complicated because the institutions in question do not operate in the same multilateral system (WHO and ILO are part of UN system, whereas the World Bank is not). Gradual development coupled with the chaotic nature of policy making
made it more difficult to ascertain when convergence of the three streams and agenda setting truly occurred.\textsuperscript{9} This determination was further complicated at the global level by the many global actors that could influence agendas, and the lack of explicit legal authority to implement an agenda through enactment of legislation or laws.

The moderating role of values in agenda setting is not sufficiently emphasized in both theories. Schwartz described values as ‘‘conceptions of the desirable that guide the way social actors (e.g. organizational leaders, policy-makers, individual persons) select actions, evaluate people and events, and explain their actions and evaluations’’.\textsuperscript{20} The “trans-situational” nature of values makes them applicable in any context.\textsuperscript{21} Results from our research confirmed the important role of values in shaping global policy discourses.\textsuperscript{9,10} Kingdon would certainly argue that multiple ‘policies’ are expressed, as different solutions all compete during agenda setting.\textsuperscript{1} Whereas at national and state levels, governments can implement policies that directly impact their citizens, at the global level, global institutions can only set policy directions. These then need to be translated into policies or legislation at national and subnational levels. The iterative policy process at multiple levels can lead to the introduction of competing notions of decent work reflecting different values. We found evidence of competing discourses in our textual analysis.\textsuperscript{10} Health equity, economic and market-based framings, and personal responsibility for decent work, were each shaped by different claims, values and ideologies.\textsuperscript{10} These differences may be partially explained by the mandates of these three institutions and the dominance of a disciplinary orientation within each. While the World Bank’s actions are primarily defined by economic thinking, the WHO is more influenced by a "public health lens" and the ILO by a "labour rights lens". Our analyses showed traces of resistance to decent work language, in part because it was “ILO terminology” and was perceived to conflict with market-based solutions to promoting jobs.\textsuperscript{9,10}

While issue definition can explain agenda access and provoke the punctuated equilibrium cycle, there are also challenges with unduly emphasizing this attribute. From our study of the ILO DWA, the agenda and issue (decent work) were difficult to disentangle (some key informants conflated one with the other despite attempts to make the distinction). While not necessarily
surprising, it can matter if the policy solution (i.e. what is being advanced in the “name” of the Decent Work Agenda) is not consistent with what decent work is, because it reinforces gender and health inequities or promotes economic solutions to workers’ health.\textsuperscript{10} Framing workers’ health in economic terms can affect how notions of decent work and the DWA are interpreted and applied. In one of the WHO reports analyzed, health is framed as a “prerequisite for productivity and economic development”\textsuperscript{22}; and “[workers as] the major contributors to economic and social development” calling for attention to “high-risk sectors of economic activity”.\textsuperscript{22} We also examined how through the Agenda, the ILO attempted to normalize what constitutes decent work; however, we acknowledge the powerful influence of financial agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) who produce competing dominant discourses about neoliberal solutions to work and health.\textsuperscript{21}

4.3.7 Research and policy implications for understanding agenda setting at the global level

A more nuanced understanding of how these theories apply to global agenda setting should interest public health actors. While these global processes are the subject of increasing attention, actual “accounts of globalized policy processes – distinct from national processes – are few and far between.”\textsuperscript{19} We must analyze policy agenda setting in global socio-cultural and political contexts over time (e.g. social norms, global organizational values and practices). This type of analysis is critical to explaining when and how windows of opportunity open and allow policy entrepreneurs to increase legitimacy of and resources for a public health issue.

While our study focused on the role of institutions as policy entrepreneurs, a fundamental ambiguity can exist between the institutions themselves and the individuals who lead them. Individual policy entrepreneurs can operate within and outside of institutional structures, as part of complex policy sub-systems (i.e. policy communities and networks, advocacy coalitions).\textsuperscript{23} They can move from one institution to another and act as boundary spanners who broker
relationships and help navigate different institutional cultures. Further research is needed to tease out the relative contributions of policy entrepreneurs operating at individual, institutional or system levels and ascertain which level(s) matter most in the global context.

Advancing knowledge of why and how some public health issues gain more legitimacy and resources at the global level has implications for practice. Public health professionals must become more sophisticated policy entrepreneurs by understanding the power asymmetry between corporations, national governments, global institutions, and public/private consortia to protect the public’s health. The Commission on Global Governance for Health’s diagnosis of the dysfunctions in global governance points to promising avenues for system change. They call for independent monitoring of the global power asymmetry, challenging of social norms that constrain sectors from addressing health inequities, strengthened use of human rights instruments for health, and cross-sectoral and transparent policy dialogue among state and non-state actors in decisions affecting public health. These global efforts must be joined up to country-level campaigns led by civil society, communities and citizens that collectively present a social alternative to powerful financial forces. “Crises—economic or ecological—present moments of elasticity in prevailing power hierarchies, but movements must be prepared to enter the political space this creates with a coherent set of social options, from the policy particulars to the normative grand vision.”

Research must be linked to these social change efforts. Our study points to the need to continually test and refine such theories as applied to different policy contexts. At the global level, this would include characterizing the nature of interactions and power relations among global actors, the control and power exercised by global financial actors, whose voices and values are privileged and heard, and the impact of these actors’ influence on setting and shaping global agendas. Research on global processes including the power relations that affect health and health equity are consonant with our recommendations. As public health professionals, we must learn from our history to better understand the fate of the many public issues competing for political attention, why they rise and fall off the policy agenda and join up with other sectors to
create alternatives and risk/benefit processes that safeguard the public’s health and promote health equity.\textsuperscript{4,21,27} These tasks are urgent. They matter for global public health, and their time has more than come.
4.4 References


Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Summary

The impetus for my dissertation was the stalling of global efforts to improve working conditions. I sought to determine if the way policy agendas are set in the global arena can help partially explain limited progress. I posed the following research questions in response:

- What different health, economic, and social conceptualizations of ‘decent work’ are reflected in the work policy agendas of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank (WB)?
- What discursive role has the ILO Decent Work Agenda played in setting the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank?; and,
- Specifically, how are concepts, assumptions and claims in the Decent Work Agenda used to influence the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank?

Using the Decent Work Agenda as a case example, I undertook a set of linked qualitative research studies in this dissertation using different methods, and engaged in a critical reflection based on both of them and in relation to relevant theories. I conducted a discourse analysis of 10 publicly accessible archival policy texts, an analysis of 16 key informant interviews with ILO, WHO and World Bank representatives, and an analysis of the utility of two agenda setting theories, Kingdon’s multiple streams model and Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory, at the global level. In this Chapter, I discuss key findings across all three lines of inquiry (i.e. discourse analysis, key informant interviews, and critical reflection of discourse analysis and interview findings in relation to relevant theories), and in relation to the research questions clarifying the contribution of my research to the literature. I then review the limitations of my research. I conclude with an overview of future directions for research and policy, building on my dissertation’s contributions.
5.1.1 Key findings

I uncovered evidence through interviews and analysis of textual data sources that the Decent Work Agenda has influenced the work policy agendas of others, in particular the WHO and other institutions within the UN multi-lateral system. This system includes different programs, specialized agencies such as the ILO, the WHO, and affiliated organizations but not the World Bank. Based on interview data, these marks of influence are enabled by the following: the saliency of decent work as a policy issue, the perceived sense of ownership in the Decent Work Agenda by different institutions, the coherence of different institutional policy agendas, and catalytic events such as the arrival of a new leader or an economic downturn. Despite the ILO’s resolve to advance the Decent Work Agenda globally, the study findings indicate that the Agenda has not been fully embraced by the WHO and the World Bank, although there is evidence of policy coherence at least within the UN multi-lateral system. My study findings demonstrated that there was incomplete convergence across Kingdon’s three streams (problems, policies, and politics). Achieving greater policy coherence and integration across institutions with diverse mandates and within different multilateral arenas remains difficult to achieve, especially in an era when global health governance is becoming more fragmented and donor-driven. Events create shocks in the policy equilibrium and opportunities to refocus or renew attention on otherwise neglected agendas. There are traces of influences from catalyzing events such as the 2008-2009 economic crisis that are present in several policy texts analyzed and in the key informant interview data. Some texts prominently featuring the DW Agenda were explicitly created as a response to the crisis. The crisis was consistently mentioned by key informants as an opportunity for change to address poor working conditions globally; however, the solutions for doing so differed (see Chapters 2 and 3).

My findings further confirm that in times of dramatic change, an institution like the ILO can succeed in garnering the attention of policy-makers including G20 senior officials. Through the policy entrepreneurial role of the ILO, the Decent Work Agenda was positioned as a solution to deal with the economic crisis and with unemployment rates that were continuing to stall well behind every other indicator of economic recovery. For the Agenda to become relevant during a
crisis period is a fascinating reprise of the birth of the ILO itself after the Treaty of Versailles (ending WW1) and a strong commitment, at the time, of the need to protect workers’ rights.\textsuperscript{5}

The contemporary challenges and realities of promoting and sustaining attention on “one” agenda are also observed. There was a notable decrease in the use of the term decent work over time (from 1999 to 2012), and in several instances, there were no references made at all to decent work or the Decent Work Agenda. While the existence of the ILO Decent Work Agenda was readily acknowledged by all study participants and traceable to varying degrees in six of the 10 policy texts analyzed in-depth, it was barely present in World Bank documents. When informants were interviewed, the World Bank Report on Jobs had not been publicly released although it was under development. I found evidence of resistance to “ILO language” as it was referred to by World Bank informants. The latter deliberately emphasized jobs and their creation but put less emphasis on the social dimensions of work. My dissertation results do raise questions about why the World Bank is resisting an ILO discourse. Does it stem from a desire to not recognize discursive leadership of another institution or reflect a need to carve out a distinct identity from other institutions? Or is the World Bank’s resistance due to its perception that ILO language contradicts the neoliberal economic paradigm it promotes? Arguments about labour and equity need to contend with the dominant frame of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism embodies a range of policy approaches that can constrain what is promoted through the policy process.\textsuperscript{6} Policy efforts that seek greater balance between socially-oriented objectives and market-driven solutions are challenged in the face of powerful actors with vested economic interests. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 3, scholars have demonstrated that the labour market flexibility policies of the World Bank are actually at odds with the promotion of decent work conditions.\textsuperscript{7} These findings therefore beg the question of whether a balance between economic growth and efficiency objectives and health and social equity objectives can be struck in pursuing decent work for all, let alone in the global policy context. As Stone observes, the global policy context is a “social and political space generated by globalization” where “agenda setting is more contested, externalized beyond the nation-state and open to the input and disruption of a variety of political agents, “some more visible, persuasive or powerful than others”\textsuperscript{8}(p5,15)
My dissertation also contributes to an understanding of how power asymmetries between social actors can influence agenda setting. These asymmetries between actors influence how able they are to put issues on the agenda, how they come to assert and also lose their position of influence in the global arena, and how this in turn alters agendas away or towards, in the case of my findings, what is considered rational economic thinking. In the words of one ILO informant, “the World Bank is a good mirror for us. We [ILO] may seem to think in our small corner that we can achieve Decent Work for all. We are a mouse compared to an elephant [WB] but they know us!” This power asymmetry can also be analyzed from a Foucauldian perspective (as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2). As my interview and discourse analysis results suggest, the language of neo-liberal economics acts as a disciplinary and regulatory power to create the conditions of possibility and the “resources for constructing what is meant by [decent work], while making other possibilities less available.” Knowledge about decent work is not only produced through discourses but global institutions such as the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank enter into discourses, shape and transform them, making some more accessible than others. Discourses between the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank (in the case of my findings) do not take place on the same level playing field. At the core is neoliberalism, which enables some discourses (e.g. market-based) to be more accessible to global institutions at the expense of other discourses, which are more aligned with improving equitable access to safe and healthy working conditions. As discussed in Chapter 2, my findings show a drift towards privileging macro-economic measures to foster job creation particularly in World Bank texts but there is also evidence of strategic appeals to economic interests in WHO documents, which can contribute to a reframing of health in economic terms.

Kingdon observed that agenda setting occurs where there is convergence between three streams – problems, policies and politics. He further noted that the agenda is more affected by the problem and political streams than by the policy stream. My findings demonstrate that there was modest convergence across Kingdon’s three streams (problems, policies, and politics). These findings point to the challenges of coordinating a complex set of multi-sectoral policies and the several underlying and competing economic, health and social discourses that intersect to define what should be normative in the global policy arena to improve decent work conditions. Walt and Gilson argued that some issues are defined by having multiple actors such as global...
institutions, civil society organizations and different government departments, others by having particularly powerful actors. 13 "In some policy processes contestation may be muted, in others virulent." My findings point to both. There are not only multiple discourses with different functions but knowing actors who position themselves by applying these discourses in different ways - some dominate while others are silenced. 12 The deeply-held beliefs of neoliberalism that are embedded in global health policy- making enable pro-market and pro-economic discourses in the case of all three institutions. My research confirms that decent work is a contested notion, and that more than one ‘conceptualization’ of decent work is operating. This is perhaps not surprising and would apply to several other public health issues at the global level. 9 As noted in Chapter 2, one possible explanation is that the current system of global governance does not adequately protect the public’s health, especially in the case of the most vulnerable populations. 10 While the Decent Work Agenda attempts to normalize what constitutes decent work, other macro-economic forces are at play. Although not intentional, the WHO’s interest in elevating the place of health on the agenda of workplaces can crowd out or silence other relevant agendas (e.g. Decent Work Agenda). Furthermore, a desire to empower workers to achieve their potential shifts the attention away from policies that address the socio-structural causes of inequities and reinforces poor working conditions in the first place.

5.2 Limitations

The scope and design of my dissertation limit the applicability of findings to some policy contexts. For instance, my dissertation was not designed to assess the influence of the Decent Work Agenda on the establishment of country-level social and economic policies to improve working conditions, which is also one of the Agenda’s objectives. My results may not be readily applicable to agenda setting at national or sub-national levels where more explicit legal authority to implement an agenda through enactment of legislation or laws can also influence what is taken up. This is also in part because of possible “differences in the mobilization of actors and the subsequent timing and sequencing of events, meaning that even differences in policies between countries cannot necessarily be attributed to differences in institutions”, let alone global institutions. 4
Given the resource limitations of my dissertation, which was self-funded, only a finite number of policy texts were analyzed and key informant interviews conducted. Consequently, there may be texts and voices missing from the analysis, which are potentially important for understanding competing conceptualizations of decent work at play in global agenda setting. As noted in Chapter 3, the limited number of interviews may have affected the inclusion of more diverse perspectives from such social actors as civil society groups, unions and advocacy coalitions also seeking to advance decent working conditions for all. Temporal factors also impacted on key informant recruitment and the public availability of reports such as the World Development Report on Jobs, which was released some months after the interviews were concluded.  

The focus on the two agenda setting theories (Kingdon’s multiple streams approach and Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium) may have limited the analysis of results. For instance, the Advocacy Coalition Framework emphasizes the role of scientific evidence and belief systems in the policy process and expands the focus beyond a few traditional actors to include the media, scientists and others. As discussed in Chapter 3, the small number of organizations was a study limitation. Inclusion of additional organizations such as non-governmental organizations and unions advocating for decent working conditions could have identified other diverse institutional perspectives and their influences on global agenda setting. My results also point to the role of a perceived limited evidence (in particular economic evidence) for the Decent Work Agenda as one possible reason for why agenda setting has not fully occurred. The Advocacy Coalition Framework, which examines the role of evidence in the policy process, could have provided another lens to analyze my results.

My findings also raise some methodological challenges. First, it is difficult to disentangle the Decent Work Agenda from the issue at its core (decent work) or the organization that is championing the Agenda (ILO). Some key informants conflated one with the other although I attempted to ask distinct questions about both decent work and the Decent Work Agenda. This conflation makes it difficult to assess which social, economic and/or health dimensions of work are being taken up, emphasized and/or ignored in agenda setting. Given the tri-partite structure of the ILO, views of what constitutes decent work by the institution’s governance structure are also
likely to be conflicted. That said, my study findings do signal the opportunity provided by catalytic events to frame and reframe discourses and to identify windows of opportunity when agenda setting processes may be better studied.

A critical discursive approach is expected to uncover conflicting and competing conceptualizations of decent work in global policy agenda setting, which can remain otherwise disguised. Rigorous application of this methodology calls for careful analysis of the context in which policy discourses and practices are produced. There are, however, limitations associated with this methodology. As with all research, the researcher’s values, assumptions and theoretical disposition influence data interpretation and analysis. As someone with diverse policy experience in academic, non-governmental and research funding sectors, I was particularly attentive to issues of reflexivity in my role as researcher. Through the use of reflexive memos and journaling, I documented my treatment of the data to ensure that my interpretations were contextually situated. I documented the mood and tone of key informant interviews. I reviewed constitutional documents and agreements to better understand each organization’s mandate, roles and structure, and I noted the nature of pre-existing relationships between these organizations (e.g. WHO’s long-standing agreement with the ILO). I also documented other features of the context such as organizational changes (e.g. restructuring) to aid with the interpretation of findings. It was also important to reflect on how my social, political and value position impacts on the research process. Given my considerable policy experience, I likely had privileged access to these informants, each with varying degrees of power and influence within each of their institutions. I was able to establish credibility early on in the interview process (see Chapter 1 for further details). I rarely encountered any resistance to answering questions with a few exceptions. For the most part, interviewees were very engaged and behaved as if they were colleagues participating in a conversation with me. In very few cases, interviewees showed some signs of nervousness in response to a question that requested an individual perspective. While my knowledge, expertise and experiences could understandably affect how I interpreted interviewees’ responses and also policy texts, I minimized undue influence by: systematically applying an analytic framework to interpret my data (see Chapters 2 and 3 and Appendices A and B), analyzing my data in relation to concepts in the literature, taking field notes during and
following interviews, and using reflexive memos to document impressions throughout the analysis.

Some suggest that findings from discourse analyses cannot or should be generalized to other situations and contexts. Generalizability was not, however, the primary objective of my qualitative research. As suggested by Popay et al., “the aim is to make logical generalizations to a theoretical understanding of a similar class of phenomena rather than probabilistic generalizations to a population”. Applied to my research, the class of phenomena involves the study of global policy agenda setting processes. To achieve this potential for generalization, I included policy texts based on relevance to decent work and the Decent Work Agenda and participants based on their ability to provide information about these substantive topics. Situational representativeness was therefore sought in order to analyze the perspectives of participants in comparable institutions or texts of a similar genre produced to set, influence, and/or support policy. Some variability was achieved by different types of key informants (i.e. informants with diverse positions and disciplinary backgrounds and/or different lengths of service with an institution) within and across the three institutions, and through the deliberate selection of policy texts – those of varying lengths, produced at different time periods, some that were co-produced by at least two of the institutions (see Chapter 2 for a complete list of selection criteria for policy texts).

5.3 Future directions for research and policy

My dissertation contributes to empirical research and to policy in several ways while signaling areas that require further theoretical and methodological development. My research makes a contribution to our global understanding of how decent work and the Decent Work Agenda are conceptualized. It demonstrates how different notions of decent work can influence which dimensions of work are being taken up in the policy texts of the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank and through the practices of these social actors at the expense of others. It also makes an
original contribution to the global governance literature regarding how to feasibly study the discursive influence of global institutions through a combination of methodological approaches (critical discourse analysis, key informant interviews and application of agenda setting theories). My findings point to some possible reasons for which the ILO experiences challenges in promoting the Decent Work Agenda. These reasons include: further interrogate how the Decent Work Agenda’s conceptual nature and the perceived limited evidence base for the Agenda can affect its degree of influence in the policy process. Informants, especially from the World Bank but also within the ILO, called for better measurement of what constitutes ‘decent work’. Over the time period (1999-2012) under study, there was a notable shift observed in the language used by the ILO in its texts from decent work concepts towards an emphasis on indicators to measure decent work outcomes. Although not consistently reported, the kind of evidence thought to be needed is usually synonymous with economic evidence. Back in 1944, the Philadelphia Declaration, which reconfirmed the ILO’s goals, clearly stated that “labour is not a commodity.” However, widely-held contemporary economic analyses suggest that labour markets function like any other market and that workers are in fact commodities. This economic rhetoric is pervasive despite robust evidence to the contrary. Labour markets have been shown to be different from other markets, in particular because of “unequal distribution of bargaining power between workers and employers”. My study findings have implications for which policies may be selected even in the name of improving working conditions. They reveal the dominance of neo-liberal economic discourses in how decent work is conceptualized in particular in World Bank texts. The latter discourses favour macro-economic measures over social protection schemes, though this preference was also evident in some WHO texts (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health illustrates with compelling evidence how daily living and work conditions such as decent work and access to safe working conditions can improve people’s chances to achieve their full health potential. The report further concludes that “poor social policies, unfair economics and bad politics are killing people on a grand scale.” More research is needed on the relative influence that different types of evidence wield in shaping global policy agendas about work and the impact it can ultimately have on the basket of social and economic policies chosen.
My application of agenda setting theories such as Kingdon’s multiple streams theory and Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory\(^1\)\(^3\) sheds light on the potential explanatory agenda setting mechanisms at play. These theories draw our attention to the dynamic and incremental nature of agenda setting, which include periods of stability and volatility. Windows of opportunity open because there is convergence between the problem, policy and politics streams that make a particular issue more salient or attractive to political officials. Policy entrepreneurs can redefine an issue or advance an alternative solution to a problem like indecent work, which can result in a window opening. My findings demonstrate that the 2012 World Bank’s Development Report on Jobs represents an effort to destabilize the position of the ILO in advancing the global work agenda.\(^14\) The Bank does so by asserting its resources and political connections to its advantage. As noted earlier, the language of economics and “markets knowing best” act as disciplinary techniques of power to create a competing and normalizing discourse about work. This brand of neoliberal economics give markets a great deal of latitude where nothing is free from commodification including human labour.\(^27\),\(^28\) Further research is needed to assess how the framing of a multi-faceted and complex issue like work can change over time through the political interactions of global institutions.

Theories that are applied to understand agenda setting must be sensitive to the iterative and non-linear dimensions of the policy process. My findings indicate that Kingdon’s multiple streams model does apply at the global level. However, incremental development coupled with the complex nature of policy-making made it more difficult to determine when convergence of the three streams (problems, policies and politics) and agenda setting truly occurred. There is evidence of the saliency of decent work as an issue that achieved agenda access, in particular in the UN context. My analysis also contributes to the growing literature concerned with the ways to conceptualize and apply agenda setting theories to different policy domains. While my research did examine the disruptive role of catalytic events such as the 2008-2009 economic down turn, it did not, due to its limited scope, fully account for multiple agenda setting influences over time. I may have therefore missed the imprints that other focusing events can have on shaping global policy agendas. These include other significant events such as the fourth wave of the global economic crisis, which began to sweep nations around the globe in 2010; fiscal austerity; or more minor events (e.g. creation of joint organizational committees to develop
guidelines) that can have cumulative effects over time. Future empirical research is needed to refine the applicability of such theories and further investigate their utility at a global level. This includes characterizing the nature of interactions among a diverse group of global actors such as more formal institutions, advocacy coalitions, donors, public/private partnerships and how these different actors come to get issues on the agenda, wield power and resources, and maintain their relative position, as well as the social norms and practices that govern them, and the control and power exercised by global financial actors in altering agendas.9

5.3.1 Public health policy implications

My dissertation results point to several policy implications for public health and also for global institutions. First, as noted in Chapter 4, there is a need to better understand the nuances of the socio-cultural and political context (e.g. global social norms, institutional values and practices) in which agendas are embedded in order to anticipate when and how windows of opportunity may open and allow policy entrepreneurs to optimize their efforts to garner attention and resources for a public health policy issue. From my research, the ILO demonstrated an ability to seize windows of opportunity by working with the G20 to put decent work back on the agenda of G20 countries following the economic crisis. Why do some issues rise to global prominence while others are neglected or ignored? Public health actors need to become more sophisticated in understanding how the framing of an issue and who is behind it can affect its likelihood of getting and staying on the agenda.9 From my research, there are examples of how the ILO managed to frame the response to the economic downturn, which also translated into a ‘job’ crisis in ‘decent work’ terms. The World Bank used the opportunity to wield their economic power by continuing to argue for market-dominant solutions to increase the number of jobs at all cost regardless of whether they are formal, let alone decent. As other scholars have demonstrated, these findings signal the importance of actor power dynamics and the global political context shaped by informal rules and norms in which these actors operate.13
Rodrik suggests that “with the absence of formal institutional mechanisms to regulate global markets, we fail to realise the potential for a fair distribution of the benefits of globalisation.” With the deregulation of labour markets and multi-national trade agreements still the norm, global institutions like the ILO need to continue to rethink their roles to be effective, nimble, and responsive to changing environments while “remaining resilient against opportunist reforms by actors seeking undue influence.” Once institutions are created, they can become set in their ways and those with power resist giving it up. The ILO, now almost 100 years old, has demonstrated an ability to be nimble and opportunistic but will it continue to operate in the World Bank’s shadow or effectively act as a countervailing force on matters of work? Others such as the WHO and more recently the World Bank (now under new leadership) are also facing similar challenges of legitimacy in an era of dwindling resources, and increased competition for them. Strongly rooted in the principles of social protection, which was identified as one of the most critical instruments to tackle health inequities, the Decent Work Agenda may get new legs. For instance, efforts such as the Social Protection Floor Initiative, the UN Platform for Monitoring the Social Determinants of Health, new leadership at the ILO, proposals to strengthen the use of human rights instruments for health, or the proposed UN Multi-Stakeholder Platform on Global Governance for Health offer new global governance mechanisms for joint multi-sectoral action, and each could help revitalize the Decent Work Agenda, eclipse it or replace it. Will the Decent Work Agenda continue to stay relevant in its current form or has it outlived its usefulness and agenda setting potential in the contemporary global policy arena? As we enter the post-Millennium Development Goal period, will the ILO Decent Work Agenda continue to have policy currency as a stand-alone global agenda, or will it be mainstreamed or replaced by other work agendas? As noted in Chapter 2, the current draft of the 2015 sustainable development goal #8 states: “to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. It implies a coupling of economic growth with decent work. In contrast, the November 2015 Human Development Report: Rethinking Work for Human Development is expected to argue for work as the relevant concept (without reference to “decent” work at the moment) rather than

vii “The Platform will derive its legitimacy from the UN and serve as a policy forum (not a funding platform) that provides space for diverse stakeholders to frame issues, set agendas, examine and debate policies in the making that would have an effect on health and health equity, and identify barriers and propose solutions for concrete policy processes.”
the narrow concept of jobs or employment. The policy impacts of such changes on the pursuit of healthy and equitable working conditions remain to be seen but should continue to be the object of ongoing study and concerted action.

Through my dissertation, I have explored the agenda setting potential of the ILO Decent Work Agenda and the different economic, health and health equity claims underpinning the discourses that shape how concepts like decent work are interpreted in the global arena. While I found that catalytic events such as the 2008-09 economic crisis and policy precedents contributed positively to agenda setting through the Decent Work Agenda, it remains to be seen whether attention to and use of the Decent Work Agenda as a policy instrument will be sustained in 2015 and beyond. As my findings suggest, greater policy coherence across the three institutions (the ILO, the WHO and the World Bank), with diverse mandates and within different multilateral arenas is an ongoing challenge. Language also matters more than ever. I found differences in the implicit and explicit use of terms such as decent work, health, health equity and economics within and across policy texts. How these concepts come to be interpreted differently in policy texts and contested globally in the face of vested institutional interests partially explains why efforts to improve global working conditions through policy have been stalled. My study also points to the utility of agenda setting theories and the need to further test these theories to shed light on which agenda setting processes are operating at a global level. Ongoing research is needed to better understand how health and social issues such as decent work rise and fall off the global policy agenda, and how actor power dynamics influence whose voices and values are privileged or silenced, in setting and shaping global work agendas. These research efforts coupled with policy and social action to improve working conditions globally are continually needed because work matters to health and human development and to the prosperity of nations.
5.4 References


Appendix A Analytic Framework and Approach to Coding for Discourse Analysis

Research Question: What different health, economic, and social conceptualizations of ‘decent work’ are reflected in the work policy agendas of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank?

Reference points: Decent Work and Decent Work Agenda (ILO)

Steps

1) Identify policy texts using pre-determined selection criteria. Select a sub-set of texts for more in-depth analysis. Upload textual data in ATLAS.ti 6.2 qualitative data management software.

2) Read all policy texts several times. Read other documents to familiarize myself with each institution (e.g. constitutional documents that reveal details about mandate of each institution; agreements between institutions for working together) and sociopolitical context in which each global institution is working (ref. to literature).

3) Do more in-depth reading of all texts using following guiding questions and definitions as starting points:
   - How is each text framed (e.g. are the texts in question ‘thin’ to make them easier to be accepted by a broader constituency?)
     - Code for uses of third person, general and vague language
   - What values and assumptions do these texts imply? (e.g. Do I see broader health equity and market-oriented and economic discourses reflected in these texts?) – using following definitions from the literature and related claims as starting points:
     - Health: absence of disease/ill-health, right to health; prevention; protection and promotion of health
     - Health equity: Health inequities are systematic differences in health status or in the distribution of resources among population sub-groups that are deemed avoidable and unjust or unfair. To achieve health equity, everyone must reach his/her full health potential and not be disadvantaged from attaining this potential as a result of age, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, socioeconomic status or any other socially determined circumstance.
     - Market-oriented:
       - Keynes perspective - pro-poor position; supports less fortunate so the poor will consume more to boost demand and consumption
       - Neoliberal view - gives resources to corporations to invest wisely; favours decisions by markets and deregulation of markets and private sector approaches.
     - Economic:
       - Production, distribution and consumption of goods and services.
     - Coding: Look for implicit and explicit uses of these terms such as health, occupational health, health/social/gender equity, health/gender/social
inequity, vulnerable/vulnerability, social justice; market, private sector, economic; business, profit; competitiveness.

- **What positioning and authority do these texts invoke?**
  - Coding: Use of tentative (e.g. might, could) vs. more direct language (e.g. shall or must). Who is being positioned as responsible, accountable? (e.g. which institution or other actor or individual?)

- **What rhetorical devices are used to construct an authoritative and official account through these texts?**
  - Coding: Look for use of metaphors, authoritative language (declarative statements – e.g. calls to action by others to do something about issue at hand)

- **What are the relationships between these texts? (intertextuality) How might different texts draw upon each other to contribute to agenda setting processes about decent work?**
  - Coding: Look for examples in texts that quotes, refers to or alludes to another text that one of the other institutions has written – for e.g. recurring elements in texts that position decent work and reinforce it in other texts of other global institutions (WHO, World Bank)

Other considerations, once above has been completed:

- Does this sample of texts represent an interconnected system of knowledge about decent work policy? (examine in relation to Foucault’s notion of what constitutes knowledge)

- What might this tell us about the rules governing global institutions and how these institutions are mutually influencing each other to set global work policy? (Might there be power differentials between institutions at work?)

- **Taken together, what does this analysis tell me about which discourses shape global work policy agendas?**
  - Look for evidence of broader Discourses of relevance to global policy arena that is influenced by globalization. What kinds of actions, interactions, values, beliefs are associated with the language used?
  - Use Foucault’s conception of knowledge and power as guides for analysis (see notes on Foucault)
Appendix B Analytic Framework and Approach to Coding for Key Informant Data

Research Question: What discursive role has the ILO Decent Work Agenda played in setting the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank? Specifically, how are concepts, assumptions and claims in the Decent Work Agenda used to influence the work policy agendas of the WHO and World Bank?

Approach used: Combine an inductive approach developed from the views and accounts of informants with a deductive approach drawing from existing literature on agenda setting theories.

Steps:

1) Transcribe all interview data
2) Check transcriptions against recording and correct any errors. Upload key informant data in ATLAS.ti 6.2 qualitative data management software
3) Read and re-read each interview transcript (don’t read all interviews from the same institution back to back).
4) Read notes taken during interviews and reflexive memos after interviews
5) Establish draft codes using a few interviews from each of the institutions. Ranged in coding a few words, to parts of sentences or whole paragraphs. An excerpt related to question about ‘decent work’ and how it was conceptualized and expressed differently by informants is provided below.

- Excerpt: Meaning of decent work: ILO terminology, “container” message; ILO niche and brand; “work and life balance and decent wage and rights and social protection issues”; “combines economic efficiency with social justice”, and somehow, decent work is supposed to capture this combination of the two; best way to get out poverty.
  - Note differences and similarities between individual and institutional perspectives re: meaning of decent work

6) Using the initial set of codes, drill down further to refine codes by sticking close to interview data. Refine until no new codes are generated.

Excerpt: Create more refined codes re: different meanings of decent work – for e.g.

- ILO brand
- social protection
- poverty reduction
- workers’ rights
- workers’ health
- Political text
7) Analyze in relation to agenda setting characteristics/potential by drawing on agenda setting theories of Kingdon and Baumgartner and Jones. Ranged in coding words to phrases and whole paragraphs:

- Coding scheme based on key features of agenda setting theories such as: cooperation, collaboration, policy coherence, influential events; issue access; political influence of Agenda; ownership. From this initial list, codes were also generated to also discern degree of convergence across Kingdon’s three streams.

Example using interview excerpts:

- **Political influence:**
  - Became a UN Agenda but has no concrete impact
  - It’s a political text
- **Policy influence:**
  - It’s embedded at a policy level
  - If it was influential, it would be a concept that would catalyze a new way of policy making
- **Issue access:**
  - “My sense is really that the different UN agencies at least, you know, they might support the ideas of the Decent Work Agenda, but they’re gonna put their own label on it and put their own spin on it, and so it’s, it’s not very common for us to kind of share an idea that one agency came up and then use it collectively. ‘Cause, you know, we call it the Social Protection Floor and WHO calls it social determinants of health and, you know, a lot of the elements are very much similar, but we’re not gonna change our way of talking about the issues to the other agencies”

8) Conduct further analysis by combining above approaches.
Appendix C Interview guide for ILO

The following interview guide is intended to outline the menu of possible questions to be asked of ILO interview participants. Which questions are ultimately asked/answered will depend on the type of participant (e.g. position or role within the organization and their role vis-à-vis other global institutions; how long they have been with the ILO; the extent of familiarity with decent work, the Decent Work Agenda)

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to talk with me, and for your participation in this research project. I anticipate the interview will last about an hour, and appreciate any information you can provide to help me learn more about how decent work policy is set by different global institutions such as the International Labour Organization. I am interested in both your individual perspective as well as the perspective of your organization. I am currently recording this conversation and would also like to record the interview. As a standard procedure before the interview, I will read a short paragraph concerning the protection of privacy:

“If you agree to have your interview recorded, the recording, as well as our detailed notes of the interview, will be kept in a protected file for a period of at least 2 years. The recording will be used as backup to the notes that I will be taking during the interview. Only my thesis supervisor and I will have access to the recorded interview and my notes. I will not share the detailed comments from your interview with any other party. The recording and any detailed notes will be considered personal information and, as such, will be protected in accordance with the Access to Information and Privacy Acts. Your acceptance or refusal will be recorded on tape for proof of acceptance or refusal as well as documented in writing. Do you accept that we record your interview?”

Thank you for accepting. (If refusal: Do you object to me taking notes during the interview?)

Do you have any questions before we begin?
About the participant: Tell me about your role within the ILO (probe for information about their position, how long they have been with the organization, etc.).

Perspectives on decent work (Research Q #1)

- How is decent work important to you/your organization?
- What does decent work mean to you/your organization?
- How was it decided that the term “decent work” should be used by your organization? When did this occur? Why do you think this happened?
- From your perspective/your organization’s perspective, what influences decent work policy at the global level? Do any challenges arise? What are they? (probe for examples)

Decent Work Agenda & Work policy of other institutions (Research Q #3 and #2)

- What does the Decent Work Agenda mean to you/your organization?
- How did you/your organization get involved in the Decent Work Agenda?
- Who owns the Decent Work Agenda? Has this changed since it was first launched in 1999? How?
- How has your organization used the Decent Work Agenda? (probe for examples). Did any difficulties arise? What were they?
- How do you/your organization work with other global institutions on decent work policy? What happened? How did things work out? (probe for examples; mention WHO and World Bank if they don’t get raised and ask for examples)
- Looking ahead, what role do you see the Decent Work Agenda playing in the next five years?
- From your perspective, what else should global institutions like yours do to support decent work around the globe?

Other

- Is there anyone else I should speak to within your organization about decent work and the Decent Work Agenda?
- Are there any other policy documents produced by your organization or others that I should review?

Closing

Is there anything you would like to ask me? Or any other comments you want to make?

Would you like to receive your draft transcript for review? (yes/no)

Would you like to receive a summary of the findings? (yes/no)

If the results are published, can I send you the link? (yes/no)

Thank you for your time
Appendix D Interview guide for WHO and World Bank

The following interview guide is intended to outline the menu of possible questions to be asked of WHO and World Bank interview participants. Which questions are asked will depend on the type of participant (e.g. position or role within the organization and their role vis-à-vis other global institutions such as the ILO; how long they have been with the organization; the extent of familiarity with decent work, the Decent Work Agenda)

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to talk with me, and for your participation in this research project. I anticipate the interview will last about an hour, and appreciate any information you can provide to help me learn more about how decent work policy is set by different global institutions such as the World Health Organization/World Bank. The International Labour Organization Decent Work Agenda is of particular interest. I am interested in both your individual perspective as well as the perspective of your organization. I am currently recording this conversation and would also like to record the interview. As a standard procedure before the interview, I will read a short paragraph concerning the protection of privacy:

“If you agree to have your interview recorded, the recording, as well as our detailed notes of the interview, will be kept in a protected file for a period of at least 2 years. The recording will be used as backup to the notes that I will be taking during the interview. Only my thesis supervisor and I will have access to the recorded interview and my notes. I will not share the detailed comments from your interview with any other party. The recording and any detailed notes will be considered personal information and, as such, will be protected in accordance with the Access to Information and Privacy Acts. Your acceptance or refusal will be recorded on tape for proof of acceptance or refusal as well as documented in writing. Do you accept that we record your interview?”

Thank you for accepting. (If refusal: Do you object to me taking notes during the interview?)
Do you have any questions before we begin?

**About the participant:** Tell me about your role within the WHO/World Bank (probe for information about their position, how long they have been with the organization, etc.).

**Perspectives on decent work and decent work policy (Research Q #1 and #2)**

- Is decent work an important issue for your organization? In what way?
- What does the term “decent work” mean to you? To your organization?
- From your perspective/your organization’s perspective, what influences decent work policy at the global level? Do any challenges arise? What are they? (probe for examples)
- How is your organization involved in decent work policy? (probe for examples)
- Does your organization develop its own work policy? Tell me how this works. (Probe for details on the development process and encourage them to use examples)? What influences this process?
- Has your organization’s approach to work policy development changed over the last 10 years or so? How?
- How do you/your organization work with other global institutions on decent work policy? What happened? How did things work out? (probe for examples; mention ILO and WHO or World Bank (depending on which organization is being interviewed), if they don’t get raised and ask for examples of collaboration).

**Decent Work Agenda (Research Q #3)**

- Are you/your organization aware of the ILO Decent Work Agenda? How did you/your organization get involved with the Decent Work Agenda?
- Looking ahead, what role do you see the ILO Decent Work Agenda playing in the next five years?
- From your perspective, what else should global institutions like yours do to support decent work around the globe?

**Other**

- Is there anyone else I should speak to about decent work policy at the WHO/World Bank?
- Are there any policy documents produced by your organization or others that I should review?
Closing

Is there anything you would like to ask me? Or any other comments you want to make?

Would you like to receive your draft transcript for review? (yes/no)

Would you like to receive a summary of the findings? (yes/no)

If the results are published, can I send you the link? (yes/no)

Thank you for your time.
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