

REPORT OF THE OATUU/ITUC-AFRICA/WFTU AFRICA PAN-AFRICA WORKSHOP ON UNITING AFRICAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT FOR EFFECTIVE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION TO AFRICA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION: ACCRA, GHANA, 4-5 APRIL 2012

1. INTRODUCTION:

African workers and trade unions have, for many years- before and after most African countries had achieved political independence, experienced deep-rooted socio-economic, political and cultural challenges of great proportions. These challenges and their consequences are illustrated by persistent indisputable facts, among them:

- That Africa has the greatest number of the world's poorest countries.
- That the greatest numbers of her people live in abject poverty with the highest figures of unemployment.
- That while Africa is endowed with vast natural resources, she remains the greatest exporter of raw materials with little or no value added, thereby creating high quality employment for other continents while most of her people remain perpetually unemployed.
- That, African workers will continue to be subjected to further exploitation and chronic poverty unless trade unions and other stakeholders make concerted efforts to change the status quo through collective response.
- That on the part of workers and trade unions, the indispensability of stronger trade union unity at national, regional and continental levels, can never be overemphasized. Why? Because governments and employers are able to manipulate and take advantage of the weakness and fragmentation of trade unions to embark on various tactics that worsen the already precarious situation of the workers.

In spite of some efforts made by African workers and trade unions to forge various kinds or forms of unity at national, regional and continental levels, much more work needs to be done to achieve higher levels of genuine all inclusive trade union unity at all levels to be able to effectively confront the socio-economic, political and cultural challenges that African workers and trade unions continue to face.

Since unity, particularly genuine, independent and all inclusive unity, can never be forced, decreed or imposed, the search for it must be a process that must be born out of certain principles, commitments and milestones which must be discussed and mutually agreed upon by those intending to unite.

It is against this background that this Workshop was conceived. The search for stronger, inclusive, more effective African trade union unity is the bedrock upon which this Pan-Africa

Workshop was organized. The Secretariats of OATUU and ITUC-Africa met recently and decided to organize this Workshop. They decided to effectively involve the WFTU-Africa and therefore invite four members of their Executive Committee to attend. The two Secretariats also decided to request ILO ACTRAV and the ILO Regional Office for Africa to provide the funds for this Workshop- a request which was positively and gratefully granted.

2. ATTENDANCE:

The Workshop was attended by 8 members of the OATUU Executive Committee and 9 members of the ITUC-Africa Executive Committee. Some OATUU and ITUC-Africa members of staff also attended to provide essential services. It was regrettable that none of the WFTU-Africa invited participants were able to attend even though tickets were purchased and sent to enable them to do so. The list of participants is attached to this report.

3. OPENING REMARKS:

The Workshop was co-chaired by Cde. Kofi Asamoah, General Secretary of Ghana TUC and the Vice President of OATUU and Bro. Moudy Guiro, General Secretary of CNTS of Senegal and the President of ITUC-Africa. Kofi Asamoah chaired on the first day and Moudy Guiro chaired on the second day.

In his opening remarks, the Chairman, Bro. Kofi Asamoah, spoke of the challenges facing African workers and underlined the importance of their unity to effectively meet these challenges and strengthen their position in Africa's development.

The Co-Chairman Bro. Moudy Guiro, also spoke of the challenges facing the African workers and trade unions. He underlined the importance of unity to address these challenges. He referred to earlier meetings between ITUC-Africa and OATUU and hoped that the 2 day Workshop would, at the end, adopt consensual conclusions.

4. PRESENTATIONS

After the self-introduction of all participants, the Chairman invited the Secretaries General of OATUU and ITUC-Africa to make presentations on behalf of their organizations.

The Secretary General of OATUU, Cde. Hassan A. Sunmonu, welcomed the Executive Committee members of OATUU and ITUC-Africa, to Accra. He further dwelt on the purpose of

the Workshop i.e. to analyze the socio-economic, political and cultural situation of Africa and find out to what extent African Trade Unions were contributing to Africa's development and transformation. He posed a number of questions aiming at finding out, among other things, whether African workers were their own masters; whether Africa came first in their engagements; what role African workers and Trade Unions, individually and collectively, were playing in the struggle for Africa's economic independence and what role they were playing or should play in the governance of their countries, regions and at continental level?

Cde. Sunmonu underlined certain principles which should be the foundation of an enduring relationship among the African Trade Union movements. Stressing the indispensability of an enduring and lasting foundation of unity, he underlined truth, mutual respect, confidence, and honesty in dealing with each other, as the most important ingredients of such a foundation.

On the way forward, Cde Sunmonu itemized factors and steps he considered extremely important. These included:

- That the process should be all inclusive. He emphasized this in subsequent interventions stating that if it were possible to create a single all inclusive, genuinely independent African Trade Union movement now, by its very nature, it would definitely not be affiliated to any of the existing international trade union movements. That the process should start with unity of action.
- That, steps of eventual unity should be decided by the congresses of the three continental organizations.

Cde Sunmonu concluded by stating OATUU's vision of a united Pan-African and authentic voice of African Trade Unions to be:

- A defender of the rights and interests of African workers and trade unions, African peoples and the African continent as a whole.
- A unifier of African workers and trade unions at national, regional continental and international levels.
- A Pan-African Organisation that will work assiduously for the unity of the International Trade Union movement.
- An organization that will work for the fast tracking of Africa's economic integration and strengthen the role of Regional Trade Union organizations in the Regional Economic Communities.

Cde. Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, General Secretary of ITUC-Africa, in his presentation stressed:

- The absolute necessity of strengthening trade unionism in the African Continent.
- The continued exploitation and poverty of African workers unless concerted efforts to assert a collective response were taken.
- An understanding that governments and employers were able to exploit the fragmentation of the trade union movement, which existed in many countries, to enforce anti-union legislation and many other restrictive measures.
- An understanding of the logic of underdevelopment; the continued desire of business interests to profit from the weakness of trade union movement; and the willingness of governments to create market friendly environment at the expense of workers' rights.

In his view, Cde. Adu-Amankwah itemized the aims of the initial engagement of this Workshop, to reflect values and core principles of independent and democratic trade unionism and consequently:

- Agree and commit the organizations to an open and transparent process of engagement on the question African trade Union Unity.
- Develop a shared assessment of the challenges facing African workers.
- Map out a series of core strategic milestones to help build mutual confidence and monitor progress towards the realization of African Trade Union unity.

Cde. Adu-Amankwah proposed that the Workshop, being the first of its kind, takes the following steps:

Step 1: Agree on the purpose of the engagement and its terms of reference.

Step 2: Agree on shared information on policy, state of affiliates, international relations and financial and resource matters.

Step 3: Agree on the way forward including:

- The possibility of working jointly on common solidarity campaigns.
- Possibility of establishing a joint framework and medium for engagement with the African Union and other continental institutions
- Determine the next steps in the engagements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Participants engaged themselves in a brainstorming exercise, following the above presentations and agreed on the following conclusions and the recommendations as points for consideration:

Points to consider

5.1. What are the challenges and problems faced by African workers and their unions at economic, political, social, cultural and union levels?

5.2. What are the elements of similarity and diversity between OATUU and ITUC-Africa?

5.3. Current areas of cooperation

5.4. How to strengthen the unity of action?

5.5. SWOT analysis

5.6. Road map

5.7 Plan of action

5.1 What are the challenges and problems faced by African workers and their unions?

a. Economic

- Decent Work
- Unemployment
- Erosion of gains made by trade unions over the years
- Job insecurity
- Non-diversified Economies of African countries
- Lack of sovereignty over national resources
- Regional Economic Integration
- Sustainable development
- No value addition to raw material exports
- No effective participation in economic policy making and implementation
- Environmental challenges
- Low levels of intra-African trade
- Weakness of development finance
- Neglect of agriculture
- Economic dependence and low levels of industrialization
- Food insecurity
- Weakness of productive investment

b. Political

- Non respect for trade union and other human rights
- Non- involvement of workers and civil society in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of socio-economic policies
- Low level of democratic culture

- Poor Governance
- Low accountability of leaders
- Electoral Disputes
- Intra and inter states conflicts and crises
- Lack or inadequate empowerment of people and too much concentration of power in the hands of politicians.
- Decentralization
- Reform of public enterprises
- Separation of powers: executive, judiciary and legislature
- Strengthening the rule of law and social justice.
- Foreign interference
- Being victims of geopolitics
- Economic democracy
- Military coup d'états

c. Social

- Quality Education and Training
- Limited coverage of social protection schemes
- Limited access to health care
- Impact of HIV / AIDS
- Quality Public services
- Gender Equality
- Child Labour
- Poverty
- Illiteracy
- Xenophobia against migrant workers
- Unemployment
- High levels of inequality
- Precarious employment
- Satisfaction of Basic needs: Food, Housing, Health, Education, Water, Electricity, Transport, communication and decent work for all.

d. Cultural

- Cultural domination
- Erosion of intrinsic values of African culture such as hospitability, dialogue , solidarity and tolerance
- Decline in national languages usage
- Absence of common African language
- Lack of self confidence

e. At the union level

- Decent work deficit
- Low union density
- Decreased effectiveness of unions
- Low level of ownership of real union values

- Low organizational capacity
- Under-representation of youth and women
- Growth in unemployment
- Job insecurity
- Growth in Export Processing Zones which exclude union activities
- Lack of internal communication
- Low management capacity
- Lack of transparency in elections
- Lack of accountability to members
- Lack of training and education
- Political and government interference
- Trade union aristocracy
- Low participation of young workers
- Proliferation of trade unions at national level
- Low level of mainstreaming gender in trade unions
- Limited number of women in decision making organs
- Lack of commitment, respectability and solidarity
- Low level of organization of workers in the informal economy
- Inadequate trade union resources
- Difficulties in unionization of the private sector
- Non unionization of the civil servants in some countries

5.2 What are the elements of similarity and diversity between OATUU and ITUC-Africa

a. OATUU:

- Independent pan-African trade union organization, non-aligned.
- OATUU does not report to any other organization except its own members through statutory bodies.
- Specialized agency of the African Union. It is consulted by the African Union on Labour matters in Africa.
- Regularly attends meetings of AU Tripartite Labour and Social affairs Commission, AU Executive Council meetings and AU Summits of African Heads of State and governments.
- Has category A Consultative status within the ILO (hence participation in all meetings- International Labour Conference, ILO Governing Body and ILO seminars, workshops e.tc.
- Sources of funds: membership fees, subventions from some African governments through the national affiliates, ILO assistance, bilateral assistance from friendly organizations.
- Support for the creation of sub regional organizations such as OTUWA, SATUUC, FETAF, TUFEA, e.t.c..
- Relations with all trade unions movements in all continents irrespective of their ideological orientation
- Various policies e.g. HIV/AIDS, Education e.tc.

- Member of the international committee in solidarity with Palestine
- Effective participation in ECOSOC of the AU

b. ITUC-Africa

- African Regional organization composed of ITUC African affiliates. However membership is not automatic but based on application and consideration, basic criteria being that unions should be independent and democratic.
- Existence of an independent space for policy making with possibility to seek solidarity with other organizations globally.
- Existence of a set of policies developed by the organization.
- Funding: finance derived from general fund allocated by ITUC (derived from affiliation fees of all ITUC members including those from Africa); affiliation fees paid directly by ITUC Africa members; Project funds from ITUC International Solidarity Fund; Project Funds from a range of Northern and other trade unions, Project Funds from ILO especially for capacity building.
- Attend meetings of AU Labour and Social Affairs Commission.
- Has consultative status with the ILO as part of the ITUC
- No subsidy from the Togolese government. Only advantage, exemption from customs duties and taxes on imported goods.

5.3. Current areas of cooperation

- A Workers' Education Programme at grassroots level called PANAF involving 15 African countries.
- A joint policy on HIV / AIDS.
- Consultations on issues at the ILC, AU Labour and Social Affairs Commission.

5.4 How to strengthen the unity of action?

- Embark on discussion and dialogue at national level to bring about unity at national level.
- Set criteria for affiliation of national centres to continental organisations, for example, vertical and horizontal characteristics and non-discrimination.
- Demand for the respect of trade union values and ethics.
- Consolidate the existing areas of cooperation, i.e., PANAF, HIV/AIDS and cooperation at ILO.
- Expand other areas of solidarity and cooperation
- Promote mutual respect.

5.5. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and Threats – SWOT

Strengths

- The areas of unity we have achieved so far: e.g., speaking with one voice on certain issues;
- Promoting the interest of African workers at national, regional, continental and international levels;
- Respect of OATUU and ITUC-Africa by governments, employers and others.
- Joint actions in the Tripartite Labour and Social Affairs Commission of AU: credibility and respect of OATUU and ITUC-Africa by affiliates;
- Trade unions' contribution to liberation struggle and promotion of democracy;
- Trade union defence of the African working class.
- Collection of agency fees from non union members benefitting from Collective Bargaining Agreements.
- Implementation of check-off systems.
- International solidarity.

Weaknesses

- Low rate of unionization and low ability to organize;
- Low purchasing power of workers;
- Proliferation of national trade union centres;
- Inadequate capacity to negotiate with employers and governments;
- Inadequate resources for organization;
- Inadequate research capacity;
- Lack of commitment to trade union ethics and values;
- Weak sense of solidarity;
- Dependence syndrome;
- Lack of trade union internal democracy;
- Trade Union aristocracy;
- Lack of management skills;
- Lack of effective participation, particularly women and youth;
- Inadequate internal and external communication;
- Failure to organize the informal sector.
- Free riders- non union workers who benefit from CBAs.
- Absence of check-off systems.
- Negative image of trade union movements.

Opportunities

- The presence of millions of unorganized workers both formal and informal;
- Growing democratic consciousness among African countries;;

- Modern means of communication.
- State subvention to national trade union centres.

Threats

- Growing anti-union actions and policies by government and employers as a result of neo-liberal policies;
- External interference;
- Political instability including conflicts, coup d'états, etc;
- Social exclusion of workers and trade unions in policy-making, implementation and monitoring.
- The erosion of trade union gains achieved over the years

5.6 Roadmap

- Strengthening the existing areas of cooperation, such as, PANAF, HIV/AIDs, coordination in ILO and AU;
- Defense of trade union and other human rights- embarking on joint campaigns(the follow up committee to work out the details).
- Economic policy formulation and development of joint representation in AU and other institutions;
- Promoting cooperation with Universities and other research institutions;
- Fast-tracking of Africa's economic and political integration;
- Promotion of people-centred economic programmes giving priority to women and youth;
- Defense, protection and promotion of migrant workers' rights;
- Promotion of employment;
- Promotion of social dialogue and exchange of experiences and good practice.

It was agreed that a follow-up Committee should prioritize these areas of cooperation.

It was agreed that a follow-up Committee be set up made up of three representatives from each of the three organizations.

It was agreed to exchange information on affiliates; finance; audited accounts and activities within two months.

Conclusions and recommendations of this meeting should be disseminated by ITUC-Africa and OATUU to all their respective affiliates and sent to WFTU-Africa.

The follow-up committee should meet in Geneva in June 2012.

Solidarity

Participants of the workshop expressed solidarity with the trade union leaders and workers of Mali who are victims of the violation of trade union and other human rights as a result of a recent coup d'état.