



## The 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the ITUC-Africa New Year School 13-16 February 2018, Lome, Togo

---

***Theme: "The Changing Nature of Work and Growing Income Inequalities:  
African Trade Union Responses"***

---

### **The Concept Note**<sup>1</sup>

#### **1. Background**

The nature of work has undergone and continues to endure pervasive and fundamental changes. This has largely been occasioned and exacerbated by humankind's exploits in technology, the demographic explosion, environmental challenges, and the fragmented globalization of production and employment. These consequential changes are reflected in profit-driven business models anchored in prop-capitalistic economic doctrines, among others. Thus around the world, in economies at all stages of development, profound changes in the nature of work are underway (ILO, 2017).

In the midst of all these changes, it is clear that the digital and gig economies, artificial intelligence, robotization and 3D printing, among other technological advances, are contributing to structural changes within industries and labour markets and, in turn, are redefining the types of jobs and skills that our economies can create or sustain. Already, the emerging consensus is that these changes will entail fewer jobs and that the few jobs available will be mostly of either high or low quality; with little in between. These gloomy forecasts are based on the premise that the digital revolution is far more intrusive in the world of work and that it creates competition between human beings and machines, not just in terms of manual labour, but also in work that requires largely cognitive abilities – the latter being an area previously considered to be the exclusive preserve of human beings, given their unique cognitive abilities.

The ILO estimates that the global jobs gap is resulting in a shortfall of wages equal to around 1.2 per cent of global output. However, with increasing diversification in forms of work and workplace organization, expansion in employment alone, without due consideration given to the quality of jobs or workers' income security, will not provide robust and sustainable support to aggregate demand (ILO, 2015). There is thus no doubt that the erosion of traditional forms of employment presents a challenge to the role of trade unions. The disappearance and invisibility of the employer-employee relationship is a case in point because it has negative consequences for collective bargaining.

In Africa, for instance, economies have for the past decade experienced a period of unprecedented growth in the history of the continent. However, poverty and inequality have not declined in inverse proportion to this growth. The obvious consequence of this narrative is that informality and under employment continues to grow on the continent as many workers are gradually engaged in Non-Standard Forms of Employment (temporary/part-time employment; casualization, 3<sup>rd</sup> party employment arrangements), which affects both labour demand and supply. These forms of non-standard employment are often associated with significant decent-work deficits such as lower earnings, minimal

---

<sup>1</sup> This concept note sets the tone for discussions for the forth-coming 2018 ITUC-Africa New Year School to be held under the theme "The changing nature of work and growing income inequalities: challenges for African trade unions". The school will bring together participants primarily drawn from the trade unions to dialogue about how the world of work has changed and what has been and could be trade union policy and pragmatic responses. While the bulk of participants shall consist of trade union leaders, the youth and women trade union activists shall also be participating. Additionally, civil society actors as well as labour academicians including researchers and educators shall be invited to participate.

social protection coverage and long working hours with low pay. Thus, to maintain the success of recent growth and, at the same time, make tomorrow's growth more inclusive, it is imperative that appropriate policies are executed, capable of diversifying the sources of growth and ensuring the widest possible participation of all segments of society.

Recognizing the pressing need to begin marshalling pro-worker strategies to make the future of work the one we want, the ITUC-Africa 2018 New Year School will focus on the implications of the changing nature of work for African workers and their organizations. It shall also pay attention to how new forms of employment arrangements including growing informal and underemployment contribute to the growth of inequalities especially that of income. A special focus shall be dedicated to the impacts of growing income inequalities on male and female workers, young and older workers, workers from various race backgrounds and ethnicities, those in rural vis a vie those in urban areas, as well as on workers with disabilities amongst others.

Through various presentations, plenary discussions and working groups, participants shall seek answers to and devise strategies on the following:

- **Work and its future:** How will work change with increasing technological advancements? [what type of work shall change the most and why?]
- **Impacts of new technologies on work structures and work patterns:** Who and how are most people impacted by these changes and why? [countries, women, youth, people with disabilities etc.]
- **Changing nature of work, incomes and livelihoods:** overall, how shall or are incomes and livelihoods affected in the short and long-term?
- **Education and Skills for the new economy:** what kind of education and skills-set shall be required to carry out work in the future and how can those be acquired or harnessed?
- **Changing nature of work and inequalities:** what is the link between the changing nature of work and growing inequalities [why are income inequalities growing and how can this trend be reversed]?
- **Trade union policy and pragmatic responses:** how are workers and their organizations responding to the changes? [how should they respond? What policy spaces exist at national, regional and continental level to minimise the impacts on workers?]

## 2. Purpose

The 2018 New Year School shall:

- Discuss the changing nature of work and its implications for African workers
- Dissect the link between the changing nature of work and growing inequalities
- Agree on trade union strategies to aptly respond to the changing nature of work
- Formulate a strategic continental trade union response to support efforts geared towards narrowing income inequalities

## 3. Participation and format

The school shall bring together about one hundred participants drawn primarily from the ITUC-Africa affiliates, comprising General Council members, ITUC-Africa Women Committee and Youth Committees; the sub-regional trade unions organizations, labour researchers and educators, Global union federations (GUFs); continental and international CSOs, academia and media amongst others as well as ILO representatives.

The sessions will be conducted over a four-day period. The methodology shall consist of a mixture of plenaries; seminar- style presentations, panel discussions and thematic working groups.