



Echoes of the Capacity Building Programme

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Trade union action in the area of economic and social policy

Due to the inefficient development policies implemented in Africa for over half a century and to the requirements of the new global economic order, the African trade union movement wants to contribute to the formulation of new development alternatives. These alternatives will to some extent reverse considerably the current trends on the continent, reduce the socio-economic inequalities and ensure the peoples' well-being.

Since its establishment in November 2007, economic and social policy issues have become an essential part of ITUC-Africa's action on the continent. The new international development cooperation realities induced by Bretton Woods' institutions, namely the poverty reduction strategy frameworks require an active contribution and participation of all development actors in this process. Trade unions should not be left out of this for lack of knowledge or skills.

To achieve this, ITUC-Africa, taking into account the orientations of its strategic plan (2008-2011) and with the assistance of SASK, the Finish Trade Union Centre, and other partners initiated actions to strengthen the capacity of its affiliated organizations on economic and social issues.

Several meetings (including seminars, workshops and fora) have been organized at continental, regional and national levels with a strong participation of trade union leaders and actors who reflected on issues of economic and social development, taking into account workers and peoples' concerns in Africa. Various topics were discussed during these meetings including trade union action in the area of economic and financial governance, the role of trade unions in the consultations on national development strategies, the review of national employment policies, the review of national poverty reduction strategies and national reports on MDGs, the review of trade agreements and EPAs ... as well as issues on regional integration, industrialization, agricultural promotion and alternatives to neoliberalism.

The global financial and economic crisis and the global jobs pact were among the topics discussed. Two fora organized with the support of ILO focused on

these two issues in 2009 and 2010.

Since 2011, ITUC-Africa has committed itself to organise the "African Trade Union New Year School". As part of this forum and in the process of strengthening trade union action in the field of economic and social policy, trade union leaders and researchers are mobilized to question African and global reports on development issued by UNECA, ADB, AU, ILO, IMF, World Bank, WTO, UNCTAD, UNDP and WHO, and to formulate alternatives. This forum has already been organized twice in January 2011 and January 2012.

Trade union action in the area of economic and social policy was reaffirmed at the last ITUC-Africa congress and in its strategic plan 2012-2015. Two priority areas were targeted to strengthen this action, namely (i) development policies and (ii) changing globalization.

The objective of all these actions is to make trade union leaders and experts become activists in social dialogue on economic and social issues concerning Africa's development. These leaders are expected to interact in debates at national, sub regional, regional and international levels to defend workers and peoples' interests. The activities and actions carried out have had concrete results and significant impacts.

Research is another important aspect of the economic and social policy. Without research, no trade union action can be regarded as credible today.

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Research at the heart of ITUC-Africa's trade union action



Trade union researchers during a training session in Nairobi

Nobody can ignore the importance of research for the development of a society or nation. It is the basis of social progress and a source of innovations. Research is also crucial for the trade union movement because through research, questions are asked about the environment and investigations are made in order to propose alternatives, particularly in the field of economic and social development. Without research activities in this field, African trade unions cannot fully participate in social dialogue on economic and social policy because they would lack appropriate solutions based on a sound analysis of the social, political and economic context.

Since research is a dynamic process in any society, the African trade union movement has committed itself to it. Within the framework of its capacity building programme in the field of economic and social policy, ITUC-Africa has initiated with SASK, the Trade Union Centre of Finland, a capacity-building programme for identified affiliates. This programme based on the guidelines of its founding Congress of November 2007 takes into account the needs and weaknesses of the affiliates.

“Research is the basis of social progress and a source of innovations”

Between 2009 and 2011, under this programme, about forty trade union experts from 30 affiliated organizations in 28 African countries including 17 French-speaking countries (*Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia*) and 11 English-speaking countries (*South Africa, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Uganda and Zambia*) benefitted from 4 research training sessions initiated by ITUC-Africa. These trainings focused mainly on practical and methodological aspects of research on economic and social policy, challenges and issues of concern to Africa in this field and in connection with the global context, issues of economic, financial and social governance of African states, national development strategies, trade relations between Africa and the rest of the world, etc. The trade union experts benefiting from these trainings are expected to provide the necessary support to their organizations in the field of economic and social policy.



Trade union researchers during a training session in Lomé

The analysis of the institutional research framework as revealed by the participating trade union organizations showed some weaknesses that should be corrected. These weaknesses are related to inadequate skills, lack of infrastructure and financial, material and technical means and to some extent to the lack of vision of some trade union leaders in the field of trade union research. The solutions proposed to overcome these weaknesses are as follows: making trade union research

more professional, developing synergies with the academia and other research institutions close to the trade union movement in order to benefit from their expertise, and formalizing relations with these institutions. Dissemination of training programmes and establishment of networks on various research themes would also help address these weaknesses.

On the basis of the achievements of this capacity building programme, research teams have been formed and are ready to conduct research on economic and social policy issues within beneficiary trade union organizations. Participating organizations were able to properly diagnose their socio-economic context and highlighted the opportunities, threats, constraints and advantages. They were also provided with appropriate tools to analyse unemployment problems, deterioration of purchasing power, poverty, public resources management and development strategies implemented in their countries. These trainings enabled these organizations to restructure their sensitization and advocacy activities and their campaigns for solutions to address the problem of deteriorating living conditions of workers and to formulate alternative development strategies.

As a follow up to the programme and taking into account the needs and priorities of countries, some teams are currently conducting research on topics relating to: (i) *employment, decent work, working conditions and poverty reduction*, (ii) *alternatives to neoliberalism*, (iii) *regional integration and trade issues*.

The outcomes of these research works are going to be the responses of ITUC-Africa's affiliates to the economic and social development problems identified in their countries.

ITUC-Africa's vision on development strategies

Over fifty years after independence, Africa's socio-economic situation is still a matter of serious concern. Famine, disease, unemployment, natural disasters, continuing environmental degradation, plundering of natural resources, political upheavals, financial disasters... are part of the daily lives of thousands African people.

ITUC-Africa notes that the continent is increasingly marginalized and that workers are seriously affected by the harmful effects of neoliberal practices of multinationals dominated by the power of capital. Thus, the major decisions regarding workers' rights are taken in international decision-making circles where the power relationship is clearly in favour of multinationals. Workers' rights are increasingly denied; social protection is lacking; there are massive re-trenchments; social dialogue is not effective, and HIV/AIDS is spreading. This situation is worsened by poor governance, armed conflicts and increased migration flows. It is exacerbated by worrying prospects of trade relations between Africa and other continents, including the "Economic Partnership Agreements" between Europe and Africa and the inability of African states to strengthen the integration processes they have initiated and adopted as a development strategy within the continent.

In a nutshell, the development challenges facing Africa today can be grouped into four categories, namely (i) *the marginalization and weak capacity of African economies*, (ii) *poor governance*, (iii) *deteriorating living conditions* and (iv) *weak African states*.

Debates on development issues should provide an ideal forum to ensure better cohesion at the global level and defend fairness in global governance in order to promote social justice at all levels. ITUC-Africa calls on African trade unions to involve themselves more actively in these debates at all levels so that the decisions taken reflect the interests of workers and peoples. The establishment of credible and democratic organizations and the strengthening of their capacity is a minimum requirement to carry weight in these debates.

Taking into account the inefficient neoliberal paradigm based on the dogma of deregulation and liberalization of all economic sectors and the failure of the development policies implemented over the past fifty years, ITUC-Africa calls for reflections and actions aiming to implement in African countries favourable development strategies that can cause a tangible change in the socio-economic situation and a significant improvement in the working and living conditions of African peoples.

To achieve this, ITUC-Africa believes that a change of paradigm is necessary and that it is important to develop and implement an African model. In this regard, African states should reaffirm their central role in this new development process. They need to be democratic and responsible states based on development principles and ethics. They must play a fundamental role in the implementation of development programmes based on long-term strategies, strong institutions, the private sector and social dialogue with trade unions and civil society.

It is incumbent upon the intellectual elite as well as upon political, business and trade union leaders to help African states find the right development model and formulate the appropriate development programmes for different social components. To do this, they need to participate actively and creatively in the design, implementation and evaluation of development policies and strategies.

As far as ITUC-Africa is concerned, it has already indicated its vision, calling for a bold development agenda in the interest of the continent and its people. At its last congress, it stressed the six major pillars of this vision by (1) *assigning a central and leading role to democratic states*, (2) *calling for the creation and maintenance of an enabling socio-political environment conducive to development*, (3) *proposing the promotion of regional integration*, (4) *prioritising the creation of decent jobs and putting this priority at the heart of all public policies*, (5) *stressing the need to add value to natural resources in regional communities strengthened by integrated markets*, (6) *calling for the promotion of agriculture to meet people's basic needs and generate a surplus for industry, technology, infrastructure and service development*.

In this respect, a document reflecting this vision of a new development model for the continent is being prepared.

“Over fifty years after independence, Africa’s socio-economic situation is still a matter of serious concern”

“A clear vision for the continent’s development is a major imperative for all leaders”



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African Regional Organisation

ITUC-Africa is a pan-African trade union organisation created in November 2007 following the merger of two former African trade union organisations, namely ICFTU-Afro and DOAWTU. Its mission is "to strengthen trade unions in Africa and to enable all African workers to speak with one voice to ensure a healthy and safe working environment and decent life for all by fighting against all forms of exploitation and discrimination, defending human and trade union rights, promoting social justice, peace and democracy while preserving the environment"

ITUC-Africa represents more than 16 million workers organized in 90 trade union centres in 48 countries on the continent.