



2009-2012 STRATEGIC PLAN

**PROJECT: STRENGTHENING ITUC-AFRICA'S
INTERVENTIONS IN THE FIELD OF ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL POLICY**

**STATUS OF THE RELATIONS OF THE AFRICAN
TRADE UNION MOVEMENT WITH THE
ACADEMIC WORLD**
A general overview

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Introduction

The recent history of the continent shows that trade unions in Africa have a long tradition of political commitment which started with their involvement in the anti-colonial movements and has continued until the current struggles for democracy. Further, it seems that since the 1990s, the existence of powerful unions has been crucial to the emergence of the democratic process in many African countries. However, in the context of unbridled liberalism whose consequences are harmful to mankind including workers around the world, it would not be possible to transform the current democratic process in Africa into social progress and economic change -- for the benefit of workers -- without powerful unions that are particularly capable of developing and proposing alternatives likely to lead to desired changes.

Due to their commitment to nation building in Africa, trade unions have emerged on the continent as forces of social transformation and institutionally recognized partners. Thus, they are expected to develop strategic alternatives to secure their place among civil society organisations that are increasingly called upon to play an important role in the democratic processes in Africa.

In this new context, it is clear that trade union power should not be limited to its strategic position in the workplace and in its capacity of mobilization and organization but it should also be reflected in the capacity of trade unions to generate new ideas to support new development paradigms other than unbridled liberalism. To do this, the African trade union movement should consider working in synergy with other civil society organisations and developing new forms of partnership with research centres and universities to acquire the means to confront and challenge the dominant paradigm that is liberalism. In recent years, some affiliates of the ITUC-Africa have begun to closely work with universities and research centres to develop their capacity to develop alternatives to the neoliberal paradigm.

Unions and universities have made an effort to reach out to each other for useful purposes. Trade unions reach out to universities when they need to do research to support their campaigns. Researchers reach out to unions when they need contacts and support for their research funding proposals.

However, the true partnership is based on reciprocity and the willingness to learn from each other.

GLU (Global Labour University) and GURN (Global Union Researchers Network) are examples of new partnerships between educational institutions and workers organizations, which might form a global network for discussion. These partnerships are intended to push trade unions and universities to develop new academic curricula which extend the debates and the basis of knowledge of issues related to trade unionism in the universities.

In this process of collaboration and exchange based on research activities, the African trade union movement should take into account the synergies with the various components of civil society. That was why within the framework of the ITUC-Africa/SASK project, the evaluation of the relations between the trade union movement and the academia was regarded as an important activity.

This report presents the results of the investigations made so far. In addition to the introduction and the conclusion, it consists of three points.

1. Methodology

In this study, three methodological approaches were considered.

The first approach was based on an analytic evaluation of the relationship between the trade union movement and the academia (this was based on the questionnaire of the 2009 inventory)

The second method was based on the sensitisation of 33 affiliated organizations involved in the methodological research workshops. These workshops were the Nairobi workshop held in April 2010 for 13 English-speaking affiliates and the Lomé workshop organised for 20 French-speaking affiliates in May 2010. Four English-speaking affiliates (GFL of Ghana, MCTU of Malawi, SFTU of Swaziland and SLLC of Sierra Leone) and seven French-speaking affiliates (CDT of DRC, CESTRAR of Rwanda, CSA of Senegal, CSB of Burkina Faso, CSTC of Cameroon, USTG of Guinea and UTM of Mauritania) prepared and sent a note to the ITUC-Africa.

The third method focused on the use of information gathered from the focus groups formed by the researchers participating in the methodological research workshops of June 2011 in Lomé and of July 2011 in Nairobi as well as from ALRN and ITUC-Africa trade union leaders.

During the Lomé workshop, information was collected from 12 organizations. These were CSTT, UNSIT and CNTT of Togo, COSYGA of Gabon, CSC of Congo, CSA-Benin, UNSTB of Benin, CSTC of the C.A.R., CNT of Niger, CSTM of Mali, COSYBU of Burundi and Dignité of Côte d'Ivoire.

During the Nairobi workshop in July 2011, information was collected from 8 affiliates, namely BFTU of Botswana, CETU of Ethiopia, CONSAWU of South Africa, COTU of Kenya, NACTU of South Africa, NOTU of Uganda, TUCTA of Tanzania and ZCTU of Zambia.

2 Synthesis of the various notes

2.1 Situation of English-speaking affiliates

Four out of the 13 English-speaking affiliates that took part in the methodological research seminar held in Nairobi from 12 to 16 April 2010 submitted notes on the assessment of the relations between their respective organizations and the academia (universities and research institutions). These are SFTU of Swaziland, SLLC of Sierra Leone, MCTU of Malawi and GFL of Ghana.

1. Situation of SFTU in Swaziland

SFTU had no formal relationship with University researchers. However, two reports dealing with decent work were written by University teaching staff.

Research is carried out at University level in 5-year social sciences programmes. The research approach of the Swaziland trade union centre in the past may justify the weak relations with the academic world. The high

consultancy fee charged by the university teaching staff can also explain the fact that the trade union centre has no regular recourse to the services of these institutions.

The attitude of the Government towards trade unions may also be one of the causes because the Universities are entirely controlled by the State. It is important to note that private institutions have offered to work with trade unions.

2. The situation of SLLC in Sierra Leone

SLLC as the most representative trade union organization in Sierra Leone comprising almost all sectors of the economy has for a long time sought the technical assistance and collaboration with independent professionals for its research needs. These professionals come quite often from universities, the Central Bureau of Statistics and the National Research Institute. It is also important to mention that there are plenty of academic and research institutions in the country working in various fields (including social and economic fields).

SLLC has already formally established relationships with a number of these institutions including the University of Sierra Leone or the Bureau of Statistics. Through its representations, SLLC is represented in the management boards of various state structures. SLLC intends to maintain and strengthen its relations with its service providers to achieve its objectives.

3. Situation of MCTU in Malawi

MCTU has a strong relationship with the University of Malawi which assists it often in meeting its research needs. The trade union research network ALRN also assists the trade union movement of Malawi in the area of research. Other organizations such as the ILO and PSI International also assisted the trade union centre in carrying out a baseline survey on the movement and another survey on the public sector unions.

4. Situation of GFL in Ghana

For several years, GFL has worked with its affiliates as well as with some teaching staff of the University of Ghana, especially those of the Faculty of Law on national economic and social policy issues.

The GFL researchers also participated in capacity-building programmes organized by the Academy of Mediation "Gamey & Gamey" and the Ghana Workers' College.

GFL researchers also attended several training programmes organized by "Gamey & Gamey" on social issues (Employment Protection, strike, labour contract...)

In the area of research, GFL and GTUC collaborated on economic and social issues. Both organizations have jointly published various documents on the economic partnership agreements and discussed trade issues between European Union countries and West African countries. Their collaboration enabled them to publish several position papers.

2.2 Situation of French-speaking affiliates

In the francophone countries, seven out of the 20 affiliates that took part in the methodological research seminar held in Lomé from 3 to 7 May 2010 submitted notes on the assessment of the relations between their respective organizations and the academia (universities and research institutions). These affiliates were UTM of Mauritania, CESTRAR of Rwanda, CDT of the Democratic Republic of Congo, CSB of Burkina Faso, CSTC of Cameroon, CSA of Senegal and USTG of Guinea.

1. Situation of UTM in Mauritania

In Mauritania, the relations between UTM (Union des Travailleurs de Mauritanie) and the academia are very laconic. Invitations were at times sent to university professors to participate in some training seminars and workshops. However, UTM expects to involve more and more the academia in its future activities.

2. The situation of CESTRAR in Rwanda

Working relations and collaboration between CESTRAR and the academia in Rwanda exist but in an indirect way. Indeed, taking into account the research needs and the specialty, CESTRAR often resorts to independent consultants.

CESTRAR expects to involve in future universities and research institutions in its activities since they are sufficiently equipped to assist it.

3. Situation of CDT in DRC

In DRC, there were attempts to collaborate with the academia but these were not visible because of the institutional instability in academic circles. However, in the framework of economic and social policy research, CDT is working with the University of Kinshasa, a higher Institute of Labour Studies and the Catholic University of Congo. Final year students of the faculties of Economics also receive additional training under the supervision of the trade unionists of the Research department of CDT.

In addition to the universities, CDT works with civil society organizations (media, NGOs and religious communities).

Research on economic issues within CDT have generally focused on the food basket, the price patterns of essential consumer goods, the living conditions of civil servants, the impact of the financial crisis in the DRC, the problems related to HIV/AIDS in the workplace, the challenge of unionization and the proliferation of trade unions in the DRC.

Given the new impetus from the ITUC-Africa which is strengthening its interventions in the field of economic and social policy, CDT has strongly committed itself to strengthen its relationship with universities, research centres and civil society organizations.

4. Situation of CSB in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, as in most African countries, trade unions are regarded as countervailing forces. However, to carry out their activities in an appropriate manner, trade union organizations of Burkina Faso have strong relationships with technical partners including the University of Ouagadougou, independent research institutions and civil society organizations. These relationships make it possible to analyse and formulate development alternatives for the country.

5. Situation of CSTC (CCTU) in Cameroon

In Cameroon, labour relations between universities, colleges and the trade union movement have not yet matured and are often restricted to participation in conferences and debates on specific issues. The trade union movement in Cameroon has no formal relationship with research institutions. However, given the current realities and circumstances, there is a tendency towards dialogue and collaboration between various institutions of the academic world and the trade union movement to ensure a brighter future for the trade union movement.

6. Situation of CSA in Senegal

In Senegal, the partnership between research institutions and trade unions in the field of economic and social policy is twofold: (i) partnership between the ILO sub-regional office or the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the unions; (ii) partnership between independent research institutions of NGOs and development partners and the trade unions.

In the first case, studies are often conducted by the ILO or FES in partnership with trade unions. Workers have easy access to the results of these studies. It should be noted that these research activities are not very important in this partnership.

In the 2nd case, exchanges are very few because NGOs do research on their own even if unions often have access to their publications.

At the University level, several trade unionists are working in research institutes such as Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire (IFAN) or Institut sénégalais de recherche agricole (ISRA). However, there is no formal partnership between trade unions and these research institutions.

Regional Research Institutions such as CODESRIA (Council for the development of scientific research in Africa) or IRD (Research Institute for development) also exist in Senegal. The trade union movement in Senegal might establish good relationships with these institutions to boost trade union research and enhance the well-being of the people in general and workers in particular.

7. Situation of USTG in Guinea

In Guinea, trade union structures do not have at the moment a Research Department. They work quite often with independent research institutions, especially the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Sonfonia University, the Guinean Association for Youth employment, the Economic and Social Council to name a few. Most of the studies conducted by USTG in the field of economic and social issues have been handled by independent consultants.

3. Information gathered during research workshops in Nairobi and Lomé

This information was provided by affiliates during a meeting on the organizational and institutional aspect of Trade Union research organised during the methodological research workshops in Lomé and Nairobi respectively on 20-23 June, 2011 and from June 28 to July 1, 2011.

3.1 Information collected from English-speaking affiliates

An analysis of the information provided reveals that close cooperation relations sealed by systematic agreements between trade unions and research institutions and the academia are very few. However, some relationships have been reported in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Botswana and Malawi. It is generally ad hoc work between trade unions and academic institutions.

3.2 Information collected from French-speaking affiliates

An analysis of the information provided by the French-speaking affiliates reveals the following: in Côte d'Ivoire, DIGNITE is establishing formal relations with the academia. The same applies to COSYGA in Gabon. In Togo, out of the three affiliates, only CSTT is establishing formal relations with University teaching staff whose union is affiliated to the trade union centre. In these cases, the relations are marked by ad hoc research on issues of economic and social development. In some centres, these relationships do exist but are not formalized. It is the case of CSTM in Mali, UNSTB and CSA in Benin, CSTC in the C.A.R., CNT in Niger and CSA in Senegal.

3.3 Information collected from senior researchers and leaders of the African trade union movement

The various consultations with these people have revealed the existence of various experiences reported by continental trade union organisations (ICFTU-AFRO, DOAWTU and OATUU). These organizations have developed working relations with the academia through individual collaborative projects with university experts and researchers. The most significant case was the PADEP Programme (African programme for participatory development) which mobilized from 1985 to 2006 trade-union organizations of about 20 African countries. Due to the socio-political changes of the 1990s, these African trade unions tried with the assistance of the experts of some African universities to study the implications of social changes and political transformations for labour relations and Trade Union action in Africa. Research was conducted on structural adjustment programmes and the African economies, democratic change, the trade union movement and industrial relations in Africa. This research led at times to programmes and training workshops for trade unionists. However, these interesting experiences did not render the relations between unions and the academia more systematic. No functional and practical collaborative projects leading to trade union research institutes and programmes were undertaken in Africa as a result of these experiences.

Conclusion

In the light of the information provided by the affiliates participating in the survey, it is clear that the cooperation between the African trade unions and the academia in the area of research is not yet fully developed. Apart from some countries like Ghana, the D.R.C., Senegal or Togo, where affiliates maintain regular working relations with university experts, there are almost no formal collaboration agreements between the African trade union movement and the universities and/or research institutions. The existing relations are limited to the participation of professionals of academic institutions in seminars, especially when trade unions request them to do consultancy work.

This situation may be due to the fact that trade union organizations are not properly involved in research activities in the field of economic and social policy. It may also be due to the fact that little importance is attached to the questions of research because of the African trade union leaders' lack of vision. Other major constraints like the organisational and institutional weaknesses of trade union research structures are also responsible for the situation.

Therefore, there is quasi-absence of relations between the trade union movement and the academia as well as research institutions as suggested by the information collected within the framework of this analysis. However, research institutions and universities have the necessary competences to assist the trade union movement in fighting for the well-being of workers by formulating suitable development policies and alternatives.

To properly defend the interests of the workers that they represent, the African trade-union organizations should:

- (i) prioritise research by creating research departments within their offices or by strengthening those which are already in existence;
- (ii) build their capacity to analyse the major economic and social issues in order to ensure a harmonious development of the various social groups as well as of the African continent as a whole, taking into consideration the requirements of the new world economic order;

- (iii) find the ways and means to strengthen their collaboration with universities and research institutions by providing their research departments with adequate budgets and by reaching with universities and research institutions formal agreements so that the latter may assist them in building their capacity and formulating suitable policies to defend workers' interests.