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AFRICAN TRADE UNION KEY DEMANDS FOR COP 28

Context

The African Trade Union movement, represented by the ITUC-Africa, organised a meeting on the 8th of November 2023, bringing together affiliates from various countries and the African representatives of Global Union Federations (GUFs) ahead of COP28, scheduled to take place in Dubai in December 2023. The Meeting recalled the importance of the Conference of Parties (COP) of the UNFCCC, the challenging global and regional contexts, the positions of the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) and issues emerging from the African Climate Summit of September 2023, deliberated on the COP 28 Agenda and what it means for Africa's development priorities, and agreed on African trade union priority demands/issues.

The historical importance of the UNFCCC is rooted in the fact that it addresses an over-arching existential threat that entails the highest forms and levels of collaboration among all people. The COP 28 will take place at a time when geopolitical tensions have grown to unprecedented levels, expressing itself variously, including the Russia – Ukraine war and the Israeli genocidal attacks on Palestinians in Gaza following the despicable 7th October Hamas attacks. Peace and security challenges are rife in Africa, especially in the Sudan, Sahel, and others. Besides, workers', peoples' and human rights are under severe attacks in some countries.

The discussions recalled science-based climatic facts pertinent to Africa's development and climate negotiations validated by the most recent Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports. It noted that the world is far from being on track to keep temperature rise within 1.5 degrees Centigrade, as agreed in Paris. Besides, Africa, which has contributed the least to the climate crisis, continues to be the most harshly impacted under all emissions scenarios, with projections pointing to more frequent and intense floods, droughts, heatwaves, storms and wildfires. The estimated economic costs piled up to \$7b annual losses between 2010-2019, and, still growing, it threatens to reduce Africa's GDP growth by 2-4% shortly. Whereas African countries have the greatest need to reduce exposure and sensitivity to climate hazards, build resilience, enhance recovery capacity in the face of losses and damages, and strengthen their ability to take advantage of developmental opportunities, they are also the least endowed with financial, economic, technological, and technical capacity and capabilities to take gender-sensitive and sustained adaptation measures.

The daunting economic, financial and fiscal challenges in a post-COVID world formed the backdrop to the discussions of the critical social and economic challenges facing African countries on the eve of COP 28. The decent work deficits in all countries have increased when the Agenda 2030 SDGs have barely six years to take final stock. Africa's youthful population promises significant demographic dividends, which must be realised given the increasing youth unemployment, underemployment, and many out-of-education and training. The prevailing employment, income, and livelihood insecurities are more severe in the pervasive informal economies, with women forming the majority and underscoring the high gender-pay disparity. Nor does social protection rescue the needy populations;

on average, only about 17% of Africa's population is covered by some social protection scheme, compared to a global average of 40%.

Meanwhile, the need to transform the economies away from primary commodity export-oriented economies has been underscored by SDG 9, the AU Agenda 2063, and the UNFCCC explicit provision for African countries' right to development, with particular reference to industrialisation, agricultural transformation and food security. The most climate-sensitive economic sector, agriculture, is also the lead contributor to employment, GDP and exports, thus making agriculture central in all adaptation measures. Even though adaptation is so critical for Africa's survival, it is under-resourced, attracting only about 34% of climate finance without data on what goes into agriculture. Meanwhile, trade unions and CSOs note that rich industrialised countries have been most consistent in failing to deliver on their financial, technological, and other promises, thus undermining 'the polluter pays principle' and the UNFCCC foundational principles of equity, justice, and fairness.

The Meeting noted the global stock take as a critical milestone as it affords Parties to collectively conclude on the negligible progress to date and make proposals that Parties can consider in the next round of NDCs review and implementation. Against this background, the Meeting agreed on four priority demands for COP 28.

Priority Demands

1. Mitigation, Energy Transition and Industrialisation

COP 28 must make concrete decisions that commit Parties to raise their climate ambition. In line with the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, highly industrialised countries must take the lead in reducing emissions; they must also live up to their obligations and provide the means of implementation for African countries to raise their climate ambition, especially the conditional emission reduction targets.

A critical dimension of mitigation is the energy transition, which has thrown up various pathways for African countries. In this connection, the trade unions reiterate the UNFCCC's foundational principle of respecting African countries' right to industrialise as a necessary dimension of the right to development. Just energy transition pathways must enable the realisation of SDG 7 while providing energy access to speed up industrialisation in furtherance of SDG 9.

While recognising the role of the private sector in diversifying financial sources for climate action, public funding must play a lead role in ensuring sustainable and just access to energy and other public goods. Decisions must encourage African governments to establish regulatory mechanisms for private-sector engagement in carbon trading to protect and respect indigenous and rural peoples' rights and ensure other minimum standards.

2. Prioritise the Adaptation Agenda

COP 28 must expedite processes to develop a global adaptation framework to increase financial access. African trade unions support AGN's demand for dedicated Adaptation funding, which is necessary to realise SDGs concerning food, water, energy security and gender equality. It must also support the establishment of Universal Social Protection, beginning with social protection floors. Additionally, adaptation finance must enable the shift from high external input agriculture to agroecology-based production systems in line with IPCC recommendations and consistent with AU Climate Response Strategy 2022-2032, and through that, promote gender-sensitive, people-centred nature-based solutions to climate change.

Related to adaptation are loss and damage negotiations, which chalked some significant victory when COP 27 decided to set up a fund. Trade Unions support AGN's demands to take forward the decisions and deliver on them by resolving outstanding issues regarding the institutional arrangements.

3. Climate Finance

Ultimately, response measures depend on climate finance for sustained implementation, and for that matter, simplifying, clarifying, creating and operationalizing finance mechanisms are critical concerns for Africa. Dedicated funding for adaptation, loss and damage, Just Transition and gender are necessary and consistent with the Paris Agreement.

COP 28 must pursue decisions that ensure the delivery of grant-based climate finance in place of loans that push countries into another round of indebtedness. They must strengthen and sustain predictable, accessible and transparent climate finance for adaptation, loss and damage, just transition and gender equality. They must encourage a more diverse financial mobilisation, including the private sector while underscoring the centrality of public finance.

G20 and other wealthy industrialised countries must deliver on their financial obligations and make new ones in the following NDC review and implementation round.

4. Just Transition and Climate Justice

COP 28 must broaden the scope, content and direction of just transition and accord it the importance it deserves. COP 28 must recognise the JT Work Programme established at Sharm El Sheik as a central thread linking all other work programmes. Therefore, the JT work programme must be open-ended rather than limiting its work to some 2-4 years. JT must contribute to human, workers', and labour rights, which all Parties have already committed to in other fora. It must also contribute to realising the SDGs, especially SDG 10, concerning equality within and between countries. It must promote decent work by progressively reducing deficits in countries and strengthening the labour dimensions of the JT, especially the fundamental principles and rights at work - freedom of association, social dialogue, social protection, occupational safety and health, and enhanced maternity protection. Trade unions demand inclusivity and engendered participation in structures for delivering on JT and the next round of NDC reviews and implementation.

Strategic Perspectives

The African Trade Union Movement reiterates its commitment to elaborate the general content and direction of just transition. Furthermore, it will elaborate on the sector-specific requirements for the transition to be just, focusing on agriculture, energy, industry, forestry, and waste management. It will also propose transition pathways that concurrently address carbon footprints, human, women, and workers' rights, socio-economic and ecological concerns, health, and inclusivity.



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