



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultancy Assignment

Title: Feminism as a Labour Instrument: Advancing Workers' Rights and Decent Work in Africa

Background

The African labour movement continues to play a vital role in defending workers' rights, promoting social justice, and advancing inclusive economic transformation. Yet the conditions under which many women work across the continent remain marked by structural disadvantage. Women are disproportionately concentrated in informal, low-paid, insecure, and undervalued work; they continue to face barriers in access to leadership and representation; and they carry a highly unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work, all of which shape their labour market outcomes and reduce their effective access to decent work (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018; UN Women, 2024a; World Bank, 2024).

Against this reality, the *First ITUC-Africa Women's Conference*, held in Cotonou, Benin in August 2024, adopted a landmark declaration containing fourteen demands to governments and institutions. Significantly, the first demand placed feminism at the centre of structural transformation. The Declaration states:

“1. Adopt Feminism as a Framework for Equity and Gender Equality

We call on all African governments to recognize feminism as a powerful tool for achieving equity and gender equality. Feminism is not just about women's rights; it is about creating a society where all individuals, regardless of gender, can live free from discrimination, violence, and inequality. This requires dismantling patriarchal systems that perpetuate gender-based violence, economic disenfranchisement, and political exclusion.”

This first demand is strategically important because it frames feminism not as an abstract ideological position, but as a practical framework for justice, inclusion, and democratic transformation. It recognises that inequalities affecting women workers are rooted in systems that also weaken labour markets, suppress wages, reduce productivity, and undermine social cohesion. For trade unions, this raises an urgent strategic question: *how can feminism be understood and utilised as a labour instrument for advancing workers' rights and decent work?*

The relevance of this question is reinforced by prevailing macroeconomic conditions across Africa. Rising debt burdens, fiscal consolidation pressures, and constrained public expenditure have weakened employment creation, labour protections, and social services in many countries. ITUC-Africa's *Position Paper on Debt* notes that debt distress diverts resources away from healthcare, education, social protection, and productive investment, thereby worsening poverty and inequality. These pressures often have gendered consequences, as women disproportionately absorb



cuts in public services, increased household burdens, and precarious income strategies (ITUC-Africa, 2025a).

Similarly, widening inequality across many African economies has intensified concern over wage injustice, wealth concentration, and exclusion from opportunity. Women remain overrepresented among low-income earners, vulnerable workers, and those outside contributory social protection systems (World Inequality Lab, 2022). In trade and industrial policy, ITUC-Africa's work on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has consistently argued that trade integration must be linked to industrialisation, labour rights, and inclusive development. Without deliberate corrective measures, women risk remaining concentrated in low-value trade segments, informal cross-border commerce, and insecure service employment (ITUC-Africa, 2024a).

The wider demands of the Cotonou Declaration also underscore this relevance. The conference called for ratification of ILO Convention 190, stronger freedom of association rights for women, enhanced social protection systems, action on debt overhang, measures against illicit financial flows, institutionalised social dialogue, investment in healthcare and education, and women's empowerment in all spheres of life. These demands align closely with the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda: *employment creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue*. However, while the Declaration clearly calls for feminism as a framework, conceptual clarity remains limited within parts of the labour movement regarding what feminism means in practical trade union terms, how it relates to worker solidarity, and how it can be translated into organising, bargaining, policy advocacy, and institutional reform.

It is within this context that ITUC-Africa seeks to commission this study. The research should respond directly to the first demand of the Cotonou Declaration by examining how African trade unions can understand feminism in a worker-centred manner and how feminist approaches can be strategically deployed to advance the Decent Work Agenda.

Purpose of the Assignment

The purpose of this consultancy is to produce a policy-oriented analytical study that clarifies the meaning and relevance of feminism within the African trade union movement and demonstrates how feminist perspectives can be strategically applied to strengthen the decent work agenda in Africa.

Objectives

The assignment shall pursue the following objectives:

1. To develop a clear, contextually grounded, and worker-centred understanding of feminism for African trade unions.
2. To analyse the relationship between gender inequality, labour market structures, and women's representation and participation within trade unions.
3. To assess how feminist perspectives can strengthen the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda, namely employment creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue.



4. To provide strategic and practical recommendations for ITUC-Africa and its affiliates on integrating feminist perspectives into *organising, leadership, bargaining, education, and policy advocacy*.

Scope of Work

The consultant shall undertake a comprehensive review of the conceptual, policy, and institutional dimensions of feminism in relation to trade union work in Africa. This shall include analysis of labour market inequalities affecting women workers; the implications of debt, inequality, trade, and informality for women's work and voice; the place of gender equality within trade union institutions; and the relevance of feminist perspectives to union renewal and decent work promotion.

The study shall pay particular attention to the practical relevance of feminist analysis for African trade unions. It should therefore move beyond abstract ideological debate and instead address how feminism can inform labour organising, collective bargaining, social dialogue, leadership development, workplace protection, and economic policy engagement. It should also show how feminist perspectives can help trade unions respond to priorities already identified in ITUC-Africa's own work, including *debt justice, inequality reduction, gender-responsive trade governance, violence and harassment prevention, and stronger participation of women in union leadership and decision-making*.

Key Areas of Analysis

The study should, at a minimum, address the following analytical areas:

- It should clarify the meaning of feminism in the African trade union context and distinguish it from common misconceptions that prevent serious institutional engagement.
- It should examine the political economy of gender inequality in Africa, including the interaction between labour market segmentation, unpaid care work, informality, weak social protection, debt pressures, unequal trade structures, and workplace insecurity.
- It should analyse the current place of women within trade union institutions, including questions of leadership, voice, governance, participation, bargaining priorities, and organisational culture.
- It should assess how a feminist approach can help advance each of the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda and support implementation of key commitments reflected in the Cotonou Declaration, especially women's leadership, gender-responsive organising, action against violence and harassment, and the mainstreaming of gender equality across union work.

Methodology

The study will adopt an applied policy research design based on two methods only: (i) desk review and (ii) expert interviews.

The *desk review* will constitute a structured documentary analysis of secondary materials relevant to the assignment. It will cover ITUC-Africa publications, policy



papers and declarations, ILO standards and decent work materials, African Union and other regional policy frameworks, selected academic literature on feminism and labour, and other authoritative reports on gender inequality, informal work, social protection, debt, trade, and care work. In methodological terms, desk review should not be described as inherently qualitative in itself; rather, it is a documentary or secondary-source method that can be used to synthesise conceptual, policy, legal, historical, and empirical material. Its value in this assignment lies in its ability to consolidate existing evidence, map debates, identify institutional commitments, and build a coherent analytical framework from already available materials. Bowen defines document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents, while documentary research scholars note that document-based inquiry can be both rigorous and cost-effective for policy-oriented studies where substantial source material already exists (Bowen, 2009; Mogalakwe, 2006).

The *expert interview* component will provide the qualitative dimension of the study. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a purposively selected group of respondents, likely to include trade union leaders, members of women's committees, labour researchers, gender specialists, organisers, and selected practitioners with direct experience in labour policy, collective bargaining, social dialogue, and institutional reform. Expert interviews are particularly appropriate where the study seeks informed judgement, institutional memory, implementation insight, and forward-looking recommendations rather than broad population estimates. Methodological literature treats expert interviewing as a recognised qualitative method for eliciting specialised knowledge from actors who occupy strategic positions within a field and can interpret both formal structures and lived practice (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009).

The combination of documentary review and expert interviews is justified for three reasons. First, the assignment is fundamentally analytical and policy-facing. It seeks conceptual clarity, institutional interpretation, and strategic recommendations rather than statistical measurement. Second, a substantial body of relevant source material already exists within ITUC-Africa's own publications and within the wider literature on labour, gender, debt, trade, and social protection. Third, expert interviews will allow the study to test documentary findings against institutional realities and practical trade union experience, thereby strengthening validity through triangulation between published evidence and informed practitioner insight (Bowen, 2009; Bogner et al., 2009).

Deliverables

The consultant shall submit the following outputs:

- An inception report setting out the analytical framework, workplan, detailed methodology, and interview guide.
- A concise desk review paper summarising the main conceptual, institutional, and policy literature relevant to the study.
- A summary note of expert interviews highlighting emerging themes, convergences, and contested issues.
- A draft analytical report for internal review based on an agreed tables of contents.



- A final report incorporating comments and containing clear recommendations for ITUC-Africa and its affiliates.

Duration

The assignment shall be completed within twelve weeks from the date of commencement, unless otherwise agreed.

Consultant Profile

The consultant, or consulting team, should have demonstrated expertise in labour studies, labour economics, gender policy, industrial relations, sociology, political economy, or a related field. Strong knowledge of African labour markets, trade union institutions, decent work policy, and gender equality issues is essential. Prior experience in policy research for workers' organisations, regional institutions, or international agencies will be an advantage.

Reporting and Institutional Arrangements

The assignment shall be managed by ALREI, ITUC-Africa, with technical oversight by ALREI and collaboration with the relevant programme unit responsible for gender equality and social protection. This arrangement is consistent with the commissioning email, which states that ALREI should direct the research process and ensure quality control, while working in direct collaboration with the programme coordinator responsible for the theme.

Submission of Expressions of Interest

Interested consultants or consulting firms are invited to submit an **Expression of Interest (EOI)** for this assignment no later than **25 May 2026, 23:59 GMT**.

Applications should be sent electronically to: alrei@ituc-africa.org with the subject line: **Expression of Interest – Feminism as a Labour Instrument Study**

Required Submission Documents

Interested applicants should submit the following:

1. Technical Proposal outlining understanding of the assignment, proposed methodology, and workplan.
2. Brief Financial Proposal indicating the total consultancy fee in USD, inclusive of all professional costs.
3. Curriculum Vitae (CV) of the lead consultant and any proposed team members.
4. Examples of Previous Relevant Work (research reports, publications, policy papers, or similar assignments). *Optional*

Selection Process



Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted. ITUC-Africa/ALREI reserves the right not to make any appointment arising from this call.

Selected References

Bogner, A., Littig, B., & Menz, W. (Eds.). (2009). *Interviewing experts*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

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International Labour Organization. (2018). *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture* (3rd ed.). Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

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Mogalakwe, M. (2006). The use of documentary research methods in social research. *African Sociological Review*, 10(1), 221–230.

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UN Women. (2024a). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2024*. New York, NY: Author. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications>

World Bank. (2024). *Women, business and the law 2024*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://wbi.worldbank.org/en/wbi>

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