



2014-18 ITUC Frontlines and Priorities

Region: ITUC-Africa

Highlights

This report covers the main areas of work of the African Regional Organisation of the ITUC during the period 2014–2018. It includes work carried out in collaboration with the ITUC Secretariat in Brussels, as well as work undertaken with the assistance or in cooperation with a range of Solidarity Support Organisations (SSOs).

During the period under review, ITUC-Africa convened its Third Congress. It took place at the end of November 2015 in Dakar under the theme of *'Strong Trade Unions for a Better Africa'*.

The main business of Congress was carried out in three sub-plenaries that dealt with:

- a. State of our organisations – Organising;
- b. Social protection, living minimum wages, access to public services, particularly public health;
- c. Resource mobilisation and the structural transformation of Africa.

Conclusions from the sub-plenaries were tabled at plenary and adopted as decisions of Congress. In addition, Congress adopted two resolutions on Migration and Climate Change.

Since the beginning of 2016, ITUC-Africa has undertaken activities to implement the Strategic Plan that it adopted following the Resolutions from Congress. Priority areas of the Plan include:

- Human and trade union rights;
- Peace and security;
- Migration
- Social protection;
- Gender equality;
- Organising and workers' empowerment;
- Trade union unity and youth work;
- Structural transformation for development; and
- Climate change.

In carrying out its work a number of activities intersected with the frontlines and priorities of the ITUC.

In pursuit of the objective of building strong trade unions on the continent, the ITUC-Africa launched a study on the 'State of Trade Unions in Africa' that was supported by the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN). ITUC-Africa also worked closely with the ITUC and the ETUC in hosting a Conference on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that reaffirmed the dangers that the EPAs pose for industrialisation and regional integration in Africa.

Frontlines

Climate Justice and Industrial Transformation

ITUC-Africa acknowledged climate change as one of the most pressing issues confronting society today. A study on trade union responses and strategies on climate change underlined the fact that

climate change poses a severe threat to sustainable development and thus to employment, livelihoods and jobs.

ITUC-Africa's objective for the quadrennial was "to enhance African trade unions contribution to addressing climate change and environmental crises at national, regional and global levels."

In furtherance of this, an Africa Trade Union Climate Change Network (with over 40 members) was established and major training activities of focal persons on climate change and environment for affiliates were conducted in 2016, 2017 and 2018, with the support of FES. An ITUC-Africa strategy document on climate change and environment was also produced and widely disseminated among affiliates.

Activism by affiliates on climate change is slowly increasing and more African delegates have been participating in COP meetings while ITUC-Africa has also been part of the process towards developing a Just Transition Policy for Africa.

Taming Corporate Power in Supply Chains

ITUC-Africa work in this area took the previous work it had undertaken with affiliates in Export Processing Zones in Madagascar, Uganda and Zimbabwe as the point of departure. The supply chain campaign was initially targeted at six countries, namely, Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya, Niger, Ghana and Senegal. It was aimed at improving working conditions for workers in a number of multinational companies (including MTN, Ecobank, Bolloré, Dangote) active in the target countries. Corporate research, country specific economic profiles and stories from workers and their unions on oppression and wages that were below minimum living wages were documented to frame campaign targets, strategies and outcomes to be determined by each affiliate.

Underpayment of wages, informality, slavery and forced overtime, as well as tax dodging were spotlighted as possible subjects for legal action against corporations. African governments and State institutions are being engaged, especially with respect to cases in which compliance with labour laws is inadequate.

The ITUC campaign for living wage was also linked to taming corporate power and led to affiliates in Ethiopia and Rwanda being drawn in to broaden the reach of the campaign.

The campaign is gathering steam and it is anticipated that it will gradually be extended to cover more countries.

Eliminating Slavery

Forms of modern slavery were noted to be rife in Mauritania with thousands of persons being trapped in forced labour or engaged as slaves and human trafficking took place across the continent. Governments' effort to tame this menace was identified as weak and inadequate.

ITUC-Africa teamed up with ITUC for a joint mission to Mauritania where modern slavery is well known to exist. Advocacy against slavery contributed to getting the government of Mauritania to ratify ILO Protocol 29 on Forced Labour and to establish three courts to try cases of slavery. Commitment to end slavery, however, remains weak in Mauritania with weak enforcement of the law. Besides, victims of slavery have little or no protection even after reporting their situation. Worse still, there are no economic and social provisions for effective rehabilitation and reintegration of former slaves.

ITUC-Africa continues to follow-up and monitor the process towards organising a national tripartite meeting and conference as well as a campaign on ending the vestiges of modern slavery in Mauritania. The process has not advanced much due to resource constraints. However, monitoring of the process is going on and the campaign to end modern slavery continues to be a priority.

Priorities

Countries At Risk

Human and trade union rights continued to be under attack in a number of countries in Africa and ITUC-Africa worked closely with ITUC in carrying forward the struggle to defend and promote these rights. Close monitoring was undertaken, especially of the situation in ITUC Target Countries, including Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Somalia, with appropriate interventions having been made when necessary. ITUC-Africa worked with TUCOSWA (Swaziland) and ZCTU (Zimbabwe) to prepare for High Level Technical Missions to those countries as agreed in the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS). ITUC-Africa also supported the work of (FESTU (Somalia) that was consistent in highlighting violations of human and trade union rights in Somalia. While the situation in Somalia has seen some progress in the recognition of freedom of association and the right to independent trade union existence and operations, the situation in Zimbabwe continues to be dire for trade union activists and workers' rights. The situation in Swaziland also continues to be a difficult one for freedom of association and the democratic expression of workers' rights.

Peace and security remain fragile and precarious in Africa and continues to pose serious challenges to safety at workplaces and in communities as well as to threaten stability and civil liberties. While contestation for political power is one of the main causes of conflict and violence, terrorism has also grown to become a major source of insecurity.

ITUC-Africa is scaling up its presence in the African Union's (AU) civil society structures and collaborating with others to intervene in situations of conflict and crisis as complement to the work of the African Union in intervening in such situations.

Global Coherence and Development

ITUC-Africa identified structural transformation as one of the key pillars for Africa's development. The organisation worked with the Third World Network (Africa) and others towards developing an alternative framework for Africa's development that is predicated on structural transformation. While this is work in progress, our work on trade, especially our advocacy against the Economic Partnership Agreements being imposed by the European Union on a number of African countries under the guise of negotiations represented an essential part of the struggle for alternative development. ITUC-Africa was active in the #Stop the Bleeding Campaign as part of the effort to halt Illicit Financial Flows (IFF) out of Africa and to achieve tax justice in Africa.

ITUC-Africa work in building the capacity of unions at national level to intervene in budget processes and national policy formulation and implementation is making important contributions to democratic participation by workers and their organisations in the life of their countries.

ITUC-Africa continued to input into the work of TUAC and the ITUC, particularly as it related to positions that were canvassed with the G20. Also, through the work of the African Trade Union Development Network (ATUDN) which is linked to the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN) ITUC-Africa contributed to raising awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the role of trade unions in advancing the goals. ITUC-Africa also participated actively in the regional United Nations Commission for Africa (UNECA) SDGs Forum and the UN High Level Political Forum and contributed to advancing trade union priorities in the SDGs.

Global Governance of Migration

During the period under consideration, work was done to firm up the African trade union Migration Campaign. The campaign aimed to improve the spaces for the defence, protection and promotion of the rights of migrants, domestic workers, refugees and asylum seekers. It also sought ways to strengthen the links between work on migration and development.

The focus of the ITUC/ITUC-Africa campaign includes the following:

- Organising migrants along migration corridors
- Building capacity of unions to engage in bilateral and regional negotiations and agreements on labour mobility
- Improving ratification and implementation of the ILO Migrant Workers Conventions (C97 and C143)
- Dealing with fair recruitment
- Addressing the abuses of migrants and refugees.

Engagement around the rights of migrant workers is gaining momentum amongst ITUC-Africa affiliates. The CGTM (Mauritania) CNTS (Senegal) engagement continues to help provide information and care to potential and returning migrants around the border town, Sosso in Mauritania. COSATU-ZCTU initiative to protect migrants against exploitation and physical attacks has been expanded to include Lesotho to cover domestic migrant workers' issues. An African Trade Union Migration Network made up of affiliates' focal persons on migration has been active in contributing in the processes towards the UN Global Compact on Safe, Fair and Orderly Migration. Solidarity Center and FGTB (Belgium) have been important partners in ITUC-Africa work on migration.

Further work is envisaged in the coming period to strengthen trade union engagement with issues relating to migration.

Count Us In!

Work on promoting gender equality within the trade unions has proceeded. ITUC-Africa continued to provide support to affiliates to carry out gender audits and to use the results in strengthening union commitment to policies that promote equality. ITUC-Africa also worked to support the implementation of the ITUC Campaign of Count-Us-In for young women workers and for increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. National workshops were held to reinforce the capacities of women leaders in collective bargaining, the care economy, women's rights and leadership.

Domestic Workers

ITUC-Africa's work on social protection is particularly linked to interventions relating to domestic workers and informal economy workers as well as the ITUC engagement over decent work in Global Supply Chains. Acknowledgement was given to the importance of ILO Recommendation 202 on social protection for all. ITUC-Africa recognised the need for greater union weight in the governance of social security systems and the monitoring of processes aiming at making social protection a right for all.

Particular appreciation is expressed for the collaboration with LO-FTF Council of Denmark, Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) and CSC-ACV-WSM of Belgium in this important area of work on social protection.

Organising

Organising work has been carried out especially in the context of the Organising Programme of ITUC, aimed at contributing to the building of workers power. Targeted interventions have been made in the formal economy, including in export processing zones as well as in the informal economy. Lead organisers of affiliates have been trained in a number of countries including Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Togo, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, DR Congo, Mali, Burundi, South Africa, Niger, Botswana, Malawi and Gabon to implement their own organising campaigns to recruit new union members.

Organising work has also focused on promoting trade union unity, particularly among ITUC affiliates in the same country as well as promoting youth involvement in union work. In relation to trade union unity, project work for strengthening trade union capacity for policy intervention that is being implemented with the support of the CFDT (France) has been utilised to promote inter-syndicalism among ITUC affiliates in eight countries across West Africa.

Concerning youth empowerment, ITUC-Africa has made conscious efforts to ensure active youth participation and representation in training workshops and other activities organised at regional level with the aim of building the capacities of youth and raising their activism in union activities. The youth page 'Jeunes CSI-Afrique' on Facebook boasts of over 400 active youth members with regular news updates of affiliates in a number of countries. Young activists of ITUC-Africa, and Global Union Federations (GUFs), particularly PSI, BWI, UNI-Global Union and IndustriALL strengthened their alliance and capacities through three ITUC-Africa Youth Camps during the period.

Other Regional Issues

African Labour Research and Education Institute - ALREI

The Africa Labour Research and Education Institute (ALREI) was launched in 2014 and is located in the premises of ITUC-Africa in Lome, Togo. ALREI has been working to consolidate its mandate to develop research and education capacity to support African regional trade union intervention; to give support to ITUC-Africa affiliates to develop and enhance their own research and education capacities; to initiate and coordinate regional labour research, education projects and publication projects; to work with existing research institutes on labour and education and generally to contribute to the initiation and implementation of the ITUC-Africa priority programs.

The range of activities carried out by ALREI during the period under review include:

- Organising the ITUC–Africa New Year Schools;
- Conducting a study on the State of Trade Unions in Africa as part of equipping ourselves to address the challenges of organising;
- Coordinating the Africa Labour Research Network research activities;
- Working with TWN-Africa and others on structural transformation issues for Africa's development;
- Assuming full role as the Secretariat of the Africa Labour Research Network (ALRN).

International trade union support and solidarity would be essential for the consolidation of this important structure for strengthening African trade unions in their economic, social and political interventions. The effort to mobilise human, material and financial resources needs to be intensified to enable ALREI to carry out its mandate effectively.

Conclusion

The political, economic and social context in Africa is hugely challenging. There are various sources and elements of conflict and tension spread around the continent. African trade unions continue to face enormous challenges in strengthening themselves to adequately tackle the huge deficit in decent work

across the continent and to help address the historical injustices inflicted on African people. Trade union work for the realisation of rights and the achievement of popular interests in the direction of economic and social policies remains critical for the progress and development of Africa and her people. ITUC-Africa remains committed to pursuing a path that continuously seeks to unite the efforts of African trade unions and enhances their contribution to achieving decent work and sustainable development for workers and the larger community.