

ITUC-Africa Activity Report to 3rd World Congress 2010 – 2014

Introduction and Background

We provide an overview of ITUC-Africa's preoccupations and activities during the period 2010–2014. In the course of the period ITUC-Africa held its own 2nd Congress where resolutions were passed on a range of issues. These, together with issues from the 2nd ITUC Congress, covered human and trade union rights, organizing, youth, internal democracy and workers empowerment, trade union unity, gender equality, social protection, occupational safety and health, environment and climate change, HIV and AIDS, African Union, peace and security, trade, employment, informal economy, extractive industries, industrialization, changing globalization, development policies, communication, capacity development and resource mobilization. ITUC-Africa developed a Strategic Plan out of the resolutions and set forth objectives and actions for the ensuing period.

These were set against the background of the socio-economic situation of the African continent. On the economic and social front, official unemployment rate, according to the Global Employment Trends, 2013, is estimated at 8,7% (9.9% in North Africa and 7.4% in Sub-Saharan Africa). Youth unemployment rate is estimated at 17.9% while adult unemployment is placed at 6.6%. These figures mask the huge figures ranging from 40 to 90% that are consigned to the informal economy that is characterized by underemployment and precarious conditions of work and life. Social protection covers less than 10% of the population while about 45% of Africans live on less than US\$1.25 per day.

On the trade union front, density remained low with about 5% of the labour force organized while disunity exists at regional level and fragmentation at national level continues to characterize trade union existence in a number of countries.

Over the quadrennial, workers' rights and activities came under attack in several countries in Africa and were manifested variously in the denial of the right to civil servants to freely form or join unions (notably in Ethiopia); in the extension of the definition of essential services (as in Botswana); in regular attacks on trade union gains as in the repudiation of collective agreements (example of Chad); in the suppression of trade union rights and actions as seen in Burundi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Meanwhile the incidence of conflict, sectarian and extremist attacks in Mali, South Sudan, the DR Congo, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Niger, Tanzania, Kenya and the Sudan, to mention some, are worsening humanitarian crises and leaving victims in severe difficulties. Reports indicate about 1.8 million Africans were internally displaced by violent conflicts. There is also the metamorphosis of rape into a weapon of war as gender based violence grew with disturbing consequences, especially in war zones.

Early in the quadrennial, in January 2011, the Tunisian revolution begun and spread to Egypt and Libya in February of that year and threatened to engulf other Arab states in the Middle East in the ensuing period. ITUC-Africa joined the ITUC in supporting the UGTT in Tunisia

for its leading role in the Tunisian revolution and the quest for democracy in that country and the Arab region altogether. ITUC-Africa also gave its support to the work of the ITUC, particularly through its Amman office, in supporting the development of the nascent democratic movement and independent trade unionism in North Africa and the Arab region as a whole.

As complement to these struggles in North Africa, major union struggles for wage increases and national minimum wage including big public sector strikes took place in a number of African countries, notable among which were South Africa, Nigeria, Botswana, Malawi and Kenya. The struggles were all supported by ITUC-Africa.

As per its Strategic Plan ITUC-Africa activities over the period covered Human and Trade Union Rights (HTUR); Equality, Social Protection and Occupational Safety, Health, Environment and HIV and AIDS; Organizing; Economic and Social Policy Intervention; and Communication.

Human and Trade Union Rights

ITUC-Africa was active on human and trade union rights. It was also active in the ITUC campaign on countries at risk with special attention to Swaziland and Zimbabwe. The work included monitoring human rights situations on the continent and responding through formal protests or appeals for redress to concerned authorities. Protest and appeal letters were written to national governments and the African Union Commission on violations in countries including Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Somalia, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, South Africa, Mauritania, Benin, Malawi, Lesotho and Swaziland¹. Human and Trade Union Rights Networks which were developed within the sub-regions of the continent contributed in getting the protest letters to the targeted authorities. Affiliates from twenty-three countries were active in these campaigns. The Networks also made important contribution to the Annual Survey Report of the ITUC on human and trade union rights. The organization was also active in campaigns on domestic workers, migrant workers and child labour issues.

While the work of the organization contributed to increased participation of local trade union leadership in the promotion and defense of trade union rights, it also threw into sharp relief the need for reform of the legislative environment for labor relations in a number of African countries. The need also became evident for bargaining and to institute national minimum wages to protect vulnerable workers.

¹ <http://www.ituc-africa.org/ZIMBABWE-Six-Zimbabwean-activists.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/Swaziland-trade-union-mission.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/ITUC-AFRICA-CONDEMNS-THE-MILITARY.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/Protest-letter-to-the-Government.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/Arrestation-du-SG-de-Dignite-en.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/ITUC-Africa-condemns-police-s,708.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/SUPPORT-DEMOCRACY-IN-SWAZILAND.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/African-Unions-Lead-Global.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/ITUC-AFRICA-S-STATEMENT-ON-THE,521.html>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/IMG/pdf/Tchad.pdf>
<http://www.ituc-africa.org/Lettre-a-S-E-M-Idriss-Deby-Itno.html>

Organizing

ITUC-Africa pursued organizing as one of its major priorities, focusing in that effort on promoting trade union unity at regional and national levels; promoting youth and women's participation in trade union affairs; promoting unionization of workers in export processing zones, in the informal economy as well as targeted recruitment in traditional union sectors.

ITUC-Africa followed the mandate of its 2nd Congress in pursuing unification with OATUU. This, however, ran into difficulty because of the absence of full commitment of affiliates of both organizations to the project. The organization has thus settled for seeking cooperation with OATUU in its work.

At national level, ITUC-Africa paid particular attention to addressing the issue of union fragmentation, especially in francophone African countries. Efforts were undertaken to assist affiliates to work together in a number of countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Chad, Togo. Platforms for joint action were established in a number of the countries to facilitate common intervention on a number of issues. While progress was encouraging, it is important to indicate that in certain cases some affiliates were reluctant to work with others largely because of special relations they retain with their international partners and the desire to make those relations exclusive.

On the effort towards improving the participation of youth in trade union affairs, ITUC-Africa work impacted on some affiliates which begun to create more room for youth participation in their own national activities. ITUC-Africa also specifically began a process of assisting affiliates to develop youth policies where they do not have any. Fifteen affiliates benefited from regional training on youth policy development. Three affiliates in Nigeria, Benin and Zimbabwe already developed their own policies following this training.

In terms of direct organizing, ITUC-Africa was a full part of the ITUC organizing programme in training organizers in a number of pilot countries. Organizing efforts were also undertaken in the informal economy, particularly in Mali, Senegal and Togo while campaigns for organizing and respect for international labour standards in export processing zones made gains in Uganda, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Togo and Madagascar.

Equality and Social Protection

This programme area covered work on gender equality and social protection, occupational safety, health and environment as well as HIV and AIDS. The activities implemented included research, training and campaigns on themes relating to equality, gender mainstreaming in organizational structures, social protection, reinforcing cooperation and partnerships as well as networking.

In terms of gender equality, ITUC-Africa focused on assisting affiliates to conduct gender audits as means of raising consciousness and helping the affiliates to develop programmes for addressing the internal organizational issue of gender inequality. Gender audits were carried out in thirty-eight affiliates in seventeen countries during the period. As part of the results,

three affiliates in Senegal, Niger and Burkina Faso adopted gender sensitive provisions in their constitutions at their last congresses and also realized an increase in the number of women represented in trade union leadership structures.

Our work on social protection involved raising awareness about the ILO Recommendation on Social Protection for All and providing training for focal persons of affiliates for campaign and advocacy work in this area.

Other work included promoting social protection through supporting a study² to gather information about existing social security provision in some countries, training trade union leaders towards effective representation on social security institutions, and implementing pilot schemes for extending social protection to informal economy operators. Work on HIV and AIDS focused on workplace interventions in some countries and also included campaigns against discrimination and stigmatization, and for access to prevention and treatment. Work was also carried out on occupational health and safety as well as the environment. This had mainly to do with education and training and participating in trade union efforts on climate change issues, including contributing to the negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as well as establishing a network of national focal persons from 47 countries in the region.

Economic and Social policy Intervention

ITUC-Africa worked on developing capacity of its affiliates for intervention in economic and social issues through research, publication³ and training. Specific activities included training of young researchers for a number of affiliates, leadership training through the institution of a New Year School, working with the African Labour Researchers Network to begin the design of new development paradigm for Africa, and working with a West African trade union working group on international trade issues. Special effort was also made to gain access to the structures of the African Union.

The main challenge facing African trade unions in this area is how to secure the requisite funding for sustainable research, training and policy development. Also in relation to the structures of the African Union there is the challenge of securing full recognition for ITUC-Africa because of the previous long-standing recognition of OATUU which is held as the pan African trade union organization. There is thus a considerable way to go in getting affiliates to impact on economic and social policies in their countries and also getting ITUC-Africa itself to intervene adequately with the African Union and its structures.

Communication and Media

² <http://www.ituc-africa.org/SOCIAL-PROTECTION-IN-AFRICA-by.html>

Over the quadrennial there has been a constant upgrading of the IT infrastructure. The website (www.ituc-africa.org) has been reviewed regularly to improve its relevance. There has also been an active participation in the campaign on Internet governance on the continent. A network of IT focal points of affiliates is being built to help ICT serve effectively the trade union cause through training and dissemination of acquired knowledge. The main challenge was the fluency of the Internet connection.

In relation to media and link with affiliates, we developed:

A Newsletter (ITUC-Africa News) as well as Social networks:

a) Facebook page: www.facebook.com/itucafrica.csiAfrique : Press releases and information on the labour world and campaigns launched by the workers around world are relayed through this page.

b) Twitter Account: [ituc_africa](https://twitter.com/ituc_africa): Our Twitter account is another platform where information are published or relayed to our followers around the world.

c) You Tube Channel: [ITUCAfricaCSIAfrique](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUcAfricCSIAfrique): It allows us to share our videos, interviews and other multimedia files.

Network communication with affiliates: In order to maximize interactions with our affiliates, we also launched a network of communication with affiliates to share information and to enhance the visibility of our organizations.

Conclusion

African trade union work continues to be carried out under difficult political conditions for affiliates in a number of countries while at regional level limited financial and logistical resources place definite constraint on how much support can be provided affiliates in their work. Overall work towards improving the political and rights situation in Africa must continue with full support from the rest of the world.

On the other hand, ITUC-Africa is keen to carve out areas of support to affiliates in which its competence and effectiveness is undoubted. Capacity building for affiliates on a range of issues has been identified as one such area of competence. This is being pursued, especially with the effort to establish a research and education institute that can provide continuous support to affiliates in a number of important areas.

The strategic objective of organizing for union growth and workers' empowerment requires targeted action to support national affiliates and is work that must be informed by research and training at both regional and national levels.

Again, advocacy and campaigns for the achievement of rights, international labour standards, labour law reform, collective bargaining, minimum wages and the social protection floor for

all, demand active comparative research across the region together with policy development, training and coordination to ensure that national affiliates can play their requisite role on these issues.

Further, to achieve effective representation of African workers at the level of the international trade union movement vis-à-vis multilateral institutions and global processes of governance and policy making; and also in relation to African integration and engaging with the AU and its organs, systematic and diligent attention needs to be paid to the development of research for policy making and leadership training.

Thus, the ability of the regional organization to fulfill its mandates and to contribute appropriately towards achieving the goals of the ITUC are going to depend fairly significantly on investment in institutional capacity building and leadership training that can easily be taken for granted. This is investment that can provide critical support towards ensuring that ITUC-Africa can fulfill its due role in building workers' power and advancing the interests of African workers as a contingent of the international working class.

ITUC-Africa has collaborated with ITUC Brussels, regional GUFs, TUAC, ILO ACTRAV, the Regional Office in Addis Ababa and Turin Center, Solidarity Support Organizations and other international trade union partners including the FNV, SASK, LO Norway, LO FTF, LO TCO, FES, CFDT, CGT, USO Spain, ELA Basque region of Spain, CSN, FTQ, CLC, FGTB, CSC, Sustain labor and the Solidarity Center, ALRN, TWN and ATN in carrying out its work.