Whither African Trade Union Movement? Lessons for Restitution and Reform

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In Africa, the intricate nexus of colonialism, post-colonialism and unfettered capitalism has been the stimulus for trade unions to broaden the scope of their struggles beyond the shop floor to embrace liberation, democracy, promotion of economic development, social reconstruction and justice in the current neo-liberal world order. Evidence now points to the fact that trade union organisation in Africa is fragile at the national, regional and continental levels and primarily limited to the minority formal working sector with the vast majority informal workers unrepresented. Historically, among the social justice organisations, trade unions are frequently the ones with the greatest potential for mobilisation and perhaps the most enduring ones with visible legitimate national structures, ideological clarity and defined membership. However, this potential to shape the political and socio-economic reforms that can spur job-enriching growth has not been fully realised in Africa owing to several factors driven by the neo-liberal onslaught. In view of the continuously changing

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underlying conditions in the African labour markets; frail union structures and their representativeness; limited organisational abilities; questioned solidarity; imperfect social dialogue structures, the political intervention by trade unions to inspire structural transformation still remains a daunting challenge. This paper provides a critical overview of these challenging times based on desk research largely drawn from literature review and documentation on trade union development in Africa. The paper examines the state of trade unions, their organisational state, internal capacity, membership growth, campaigns and programmes essential for their strategic survival. The key national centres and their relationship with continental trade union bodies such as International Trade Union (ITUC)-Africa and Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) are critically discussed. The influence of Global Union Federations (GUFs) and their links with ITUC and OATUU as well as national centres is also discussed and lessons drawn. Several recommendations for the strategic renewal of trade unions are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Literature affirms that in Africa, trade unions emerged as a response to the repressive capitalist colonial order (ANSA 2006; Jauch 2003; Jauch 2004; Kalusopa 2011). The post-independence embrace of the enclave economies coupled with the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in most African countries since the 1980s created a labour market that is characterised by exclusion in terms of low wages, poverty and inequality (ANSA 2006; Kanyenze et al. 2006). The intricate interconnections of colonialism, post-colonialism and capitalism motivated African trade unions to broaden the scope of their struggles beyond the shop floor to embrace political liberation, democracy, socio-economic development, social reconstruction and justice (Kanyenze et al. 2006).

Currently, all evidence points to fact that trade union organisation in Africa is weak at the national, regional and continental levels and primarily limited to the formal sector with only the interests of a minority of the working population represented (FES 2008; Kalusopa 2011; Kalusopa and Otoo 2013). However, what is also evident is that, among the various social justice organisations, trade unions are have the greatest potential for political mobilisation (Moodley 2015), and perhaps the most capable ones with visible and legally acknowledged national structures that have clarity in defined membership (Kalusopa 2011). But this potential has not been

fully realised effectively by most trade unions in Africa so as to shape the political and economic reforms and foster job-producing growth (Kalusopa 2011). In view of continuously changing underlying conditions in African labour markets; the strengthening of structures of trade unions and their representativeness; their capabilities to organise and take action inspired by solidarity; an improvement in their capabilities for social dialogue; the strengthening of capabilities for political intervention remain the biggest challenge.

This paper thus provides an overview of these challenging times backed by some desk study information largely drawn from literature review and documentation. The paper examines the trade unions, their organisational characteristics and relationship with in the current neo-liberal world order in Africa. The main objective of this paper is to ascertain the current status of trade unions in terms of union governance and administration, internal democracy, accountability and transparency in the context of how trade unions can contribute to the development process at national level and the regional in Africa. The thrust of the argument focuses on exploring the lessons for restitution and substantial reform for trade union survival in the current daunting neo-liberal times. The paper attempts to answer some of the following questions:

- What are the current structural characteristics of the trade union movement in Africa?
- How effective are trade union in their current form effective in influencing labour, socio-economic and political issues at national and regional level in Africa?
- How do internal issues in the trade unions affect the relationship between trade unions and the state in each of the countries in Africa?
- What strategies can be proffered to ensure that trade unions are ready for change in Africa?

The assumption in this article is that there is need to understand the current status of trade unions and their defined role in national and regional development in Africa. In this context, it is envisaged that such an exposition should unravel the current strength of the labour movement in terms of organisational ability; representations and representativeness; legitimacy and influence at all levels involving labour rights and working conditions; employment and life. This should also help ascertain the state of internal democracy, accountability, transparency and relationship

between members, shop stewards and their leadership. Further, this article would make sound contributions towards determining new strategies to help renew trade union capacity and ensure their effective campaigning around issues affecting workers at the national, sub-region and global levels.

METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper relies on literature review and qualitative content analysis focusing on the internal credible reports on trade unions and some reports from selected the national federation or centres. This paper seeks to develop a better understanding of the current state of affairs of trade unions in the African region. Specifically, it focuses on both the macros and micro-level analysis of the internal challenges that largely pose threats to the very existence of these organisations, thereby rendering them ineffective in terms of meeting their objectives. In the process of determining these internal challenges, the paper envisages to assist in terms of ascertaining the sustainability of these organisations in the short, medium and long-term periods. In achieving the above, this paper was guided by a conceptual view that at regional level, internal and external factors which come into play in union renewal strategies and self-reform programmes revolve around three different dimensions:

(a) The first dimension is *external structure* or *external shape* which comprises the boundaries of the trade unions. As such, *external shape* embraces the principles that underpin the pattern of the union organisation, decisions on inclusion and exclusion, and border or demarcation lines between unions.
(b) The second dimension is *union governance*, the analysis of which centres on union democracy, representation and participation. It is thus concerned with internal union politics and relations between different groups within a union, region and beyond.
(c) The third dimension is *union administration*, which focuses on union management and the allocation of resources.

As is apparent from this conceptualisation, the scope of structural change is much broader than just finding a clear-cut technical solution for structural adjustment. It also affects the heart of the trade unions in that it defines the rules of interest representation, the rights of membership towards the leaders and much more. There are several analytical tools that

can be used to operationalise this framework within the context of understanding trade union self-reform and change management. However, for this study, the adaptation of a combination of the *SWOT* and *Lewin's force-field analysis* were adopted, preferred and found useful. The SWOT analysis is a simple but useful framework for analysing any organisation's strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats it may face. It helps an organisation to focus the strengths, minimise threats, and take the greatest possible advantage of opportunities available. On the other hand, the Kurt Lewin force field analysis is a general tool for systematically analysing the factors found in complex problems. It frames problems in terms of factors or pressures that support the status quo (restraining forces) and those pressures that support change in the desired direction (driving forces). The discussions that follow were guided by this conceptual outlook.

Trade Unions in the Current Neo-Liberal Environment

Globalisation has taken a deep centre stage and now rules the world political and economic order defining the current state of the power play. The global capitalist architecture's socio-economic production system has produced and reproduced inherent structural and systemic economic enclaves with evident manifestations of steep inequalities and bruised labour relations in Africa (ANSA 2006; Kalusopa 2011). The integration of technology, trade foreign direct investment (capital) and labour are some of the most key indicators that are driving globalisation. The world is now also highly multi-lateral: IMF, World Bank, WTO are key institutions in setting the tone and agenda for the world (ANSA 2006). Globalisation has continued to pose socio-economic and political challenges to the worker in the world. The world seems to be invariably hooked to this competitive economic chain where trade and investment are transcending national boundaries and thus creating both opportunities for a few linked to the metropoles and massive failures for many (ANSA. 2006; Kalusopa and Otoo 2013).

The entire process of exploitation appears mystified under capitalism (Cooper and Hardy 2012). This is a form of ideology arising out of the capitalist system, the belief that it is simply hard work and luck which makes you successful, the implication being that those at the bottom of the pile (the workforce) are either unlucky, not hard working enough or not bright enough to rise up the social classes (Cooper and Hardy 2012).

This paper agrees with Cooper and Hardy, that nature is not constituted to create people with property and capital on one side, and people with nothing but their ability to labour on the other side of the ledger (Cooper and Hardy 2012). Evidently, it is the capitalist structural production system which produces the workless person. This therefore is admittedly created through human agency in a socio-historical process (Cooper and Hardy 2012). It is not accident or indeed hard luck that workers find themselves dispossessed of their valued labour as this is structural and systemic! Thus, the working class is largely left to itself (as a class which merely exists in itself, that is it is unconscious of its full role in the system of production) and is simply raw material for exploitation; and in the capitalist's eyes has as much value as coal, electricity and steel in production (Cooper and Hardy 2012). In that regard, the establishment of trade unions is a crucial step in the working class becoming class conscious, aware of capitalist exploitation and resisting it, no matter how piecemeal! (Cooper and Hardy 2012). Therefore, it is instructive to argue that the deliverance of the working class from exploitative capital must be the effort of the working class itself (Cooper and Hardy 2012). The point is that classes become socially significant groups only when their members become *conscious of their interests as a class* and the opposition of these interests to the interests of the other class (Cooper and Hardy 2012). As put by Marx in his discourse, in as far as "*the identity of their interests begets no community no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class".*

Accordingly, most trade unions exist for historical and ideological reasons of advancing the cause of workers and the society at large (Kalusopa 2011). They engage the working social and economic order and may either accept the existing economic order or work within that order to achieve a "*favourable set of economic terms and employment conditions, or they may seek to overthrow the existing [political and] economic system and replace it with another*" (Rainsberger 1998:1). The former strategy has been called "business unionism" or "simple unionism" while the latter strategy tends to go beyond workplace issues to deal with broader socio-economic matters that affect the workers and the people, a strategy called "social trade unionism" (ICFTU 2001[1]; Rainsberger 1998; Wood 2001). This philosophical foundation is grounded in the belief in fair social transformation and justice and aims to influence society based on its organised power, capacity to mobilise and building affective political and social alliances (ICFTU 2001:1). It is committed to workers control and

democracy, and to maintaining its character as a movement. Such a trade union movement is supposed to be effective and "proactive and able to negotiate and monitor complex agreements with government and employers" as well as making meaningful contributions to national development. (ICFTU 2001:1). To any common worker, the unemployed and the larger populace, globalisation through the integration of trade, investment, capital, technology and labour has only brought about social and economic injustice. Today most African states are actively led by the neo-liberal economic paradigm that cherishes liberalisation, privatisation and restructuring, albeit in various forms. Most of them are drowsed into believing trade and foreign direct investment at all costs without a human face is that answer to development. Yet, the evidence of underdevelopment continues to persist!

The Complexion of Trade Union Organisation in Africa

The legislative and policy frameworks in most African countries recognise the existence of trade unions though with a constrained implementation environment. The most influential trade union organisations in Africa are the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), and the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) in West Africa, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in the Southern Africa, and the Central Organisation of Trade Unions – Kenya (COTU-K) in East Africa. There is a long standing relationship among COSATU, TUC and NLC. In fact, as a demonstration of this influence, NLC, Ghana TUC and COSATU have had what they refer to as an annual Trilateral Conference since 2012. COTU-K has of recent times also participated in the meetings of the three without being a formal member of trilateral conference. This predates their membership of the ITUC-Africa and its predecessor, the ICFTU-Afro as well as membership to Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU). These three trade union centres have had shared education and research programmes; actively pursued various forms of exchanges, and shared perspectives on various matters of international working class interest and the struggle to advance a new and just world economic order. Thus, for example, based on its broader social vision, NLC has forged united fronts with other social movements over the years. These include the Alliance for Democratic Rights in the early/mid-80s, Women in Nigeria in the 80s, and since 2005, both the NLC and the TUC, have collaborated with the Joint Action Forum (of left/pro-labour civil society organisations) under

the auspices of the Labour Civil Society Coalition (LASCO). At several times in its history, the trade union movement[2] in Nigeria has similarly formed or joined political parties.[3] It has also formulated people-oriented alternative development pathways through documents such as the *Workers Charter of Demands* and *Nigeria Not for Sale,* in the 1980s. It recently also finished drafting an *Alternative National Development Agenda.* Building a strong, virile and visionary continental trade union movement has always been a major aim of the NLC. It has thus been very active in ITUC-Africa from its inception and presently one member of staff on secondment from the NLC handles the continental body's desk on trade union and human rights.

In South Africa, COSATU remains by far the South Africa's largest and most effective trade union federation. The political policy of COSATU is based on its historical circumstances associated with the struggle against apartheid (Southall 1994). Thus COSATU posits that "*when political organisations were unbanned, the ANC, SACP and COSATU agreed to work together as a Revolutionary Alliance (Tripartite Alliance, the Alliance)"* Buhlungu (2010:1). Accordingly the alliance is based on "*short, medium to long terms goals of the National Democratic Revolution - the establishment of a democratic and non-racial South Africa, economic transformation and continued process of political and economic democratisation".* Buhlungu (2010:1). In recent years, the effectiveness of the Alliance and its usefulness for bringing about transformation has been intensely contested with its mainly large affiliate, National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), and probably most militant and left-leaning affiliate leading to a break away to form South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) on 21 April, 2017. It claims to have close to 800,000 members. COSATU is currently affiliated to the ITUC, OATUU and WFTU (in June, 2018). COSATU played a leading role in the newly established BRICS trade union forum. At the second forum which was held during the Durban Summit in 2013, COSATU together with the Brazilian CUT (and against the resistance of the Chinese ACFTU) successfully negotiated that the BRICS trade unions condemn neo-colonial trade patterns in their joint declaration.[4] COSATU's future role in BRICS, on the continent and internationally will largely depend on the outcomes of the internal and reginal unity outlined above.

COTU- K is the national trade union federation of Kenya and has 36 affiliates which are drawn from the various economic industries of Kenya with over 1.5 million membership. However, trade union membership has

declined over the years. When the clamour for a new Constitution started, COTU-K was one of the first organisations to champion for a new constitution. Following the political skirmishes that followed the 2007 general elections, COTU-K was the first organisation to warn the government that Kenyans wanted a new constitution. Large public meetings were held nationwide, with massive media attention. These efforts were aimed at creating a departure from the old-fashioned governance arrangements. COTU-K played a pivotal role to the adoption of the new constitution especially on championing for the inclusion of labour rights, the right of association and the right to form trade unions. Together with their Ugandan and Tanzanian trade union counterparts, Kenyan labour leaders formed the East African Trade Union Consultative Council (EATUCC) in 1988. The protocol on the free movement of labour by the East African Community (the Customs Union is already in place) will have other far-reaching effects on workers in the sub-region. Like, the other trade unions in Africa, COTU-K belongs to ITUC, seen as a gateway to European influence and international bodies; as well as to OATUU, probably seen as a historical linkage to the African Union (AU). The influence of OATUU at the AU remains a contested issue.

ITUC Africa: OATUU Relationship

At the continental level, two main trade union organisations have evolved over the years and influenced the trade union landscape. These are ITUC-Africa and OATUU. The two continental trade union centres, ITUC-Africa and OATUU, by large, share nearly the same membership, and thus duplicate their activities and roles, create fertile ground for competition, fragmentation and lack of focus. Though, in a weak position, there is also the re-emergence of the WFTU in Africa with affiliates in a few countries and an office in South Africa and makes the relationship between ITUC-Africa and OATUU even more complicated by adding a further ideological conflict component to the already difficult situation. Thus, the voice of African workers remains disjointed and weakened in their engagement over a range of issues with multilateral institutions, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and also with the AU. Besides, the trade union movement is disabled from developing a strategic plan for advancing the overall interests of workers in Africa. ITUC-Africa at its 2nd Congress in 2011 underlined the urgent need to place the interests of African workers above other considerations and called for action towards

building a viable, united, independent and strong Pan African trade union movement that is committed to African integration, unity and emancipation and that enjoys the full confidence of workers as a result of its organisational strength, bargaining effectiveness and political assertiveness in representing their aspirations. The Congress then resolved on the development of an African trade union unity road map targeted at continental, national and industrial sector levels and which was targeted to be fully realised by 2015. There was also an explicit demand for a process towards merger between ITUC-Africa and OATUU by 2013. In furtherance of the resolution, a first meeting was held in April 2012 between the Executive Bureaus of the two organisations to kick start the process towards unification. ITUC Africa regards the issue of trade union fragmentation and the relationship with OATUU as its priority issues and underscores that fact that they have made some effort. For example, they conducted research in Benin, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and DRC and found that the causes for proliferation included inadequate internal democracy and individual ambitions. In response, it adopted the "Appeal of Lome" in 2009 and held a workshop in March 2012 with federations in Ivory Coast, Niger, and Togo to develop a plan of action towards unity. Despite signs of some kind of emerging agreement on their co-operation, the continental bodies seem destined to continue operating as separate entities in the foreseeable future. Various types of agreements were reached over the years have not led to any fundamental changes in terms of more efficient and mutually beneficial cooperation (ITUC 2012).

There are several notes of discussions with African trade union leaders at national and continental level which reveal how the two continental bodies are viewed. OATUU is seen as the primary organisation representing African interests and offering access to tripartite structures at AU level (OATUU 2014). OATUU is also seen as the organisation best placed to formulate African positions for example for the ILO. International issues on the other hand seen as being best addressed via ITUC-Africa: "*The ITUC is our channel to international solidarity*", remarked a senior African union leader. The idea to merge ITUC-Africa with OATUU seems to be based on the argument that a united African voice can be stronger. However, there are disagreements which could not be solved, for example who would lead a united African organisation.

Sub-Regional Organisations Relationship with ITUC-Africa

At the sub-regional level, there are three main functional sub-regional labour organisations that have evolved over the years that influence trade union landscape namely Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council (SATUCC), the East African Trade Union Council (EATUC) and Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA). The Organisation of Trade Unions of Central Africa (OTUCA) and Union of Arab Maghreb Trade Unions (UAMTU) are hardly functional.

These three regional bodies ae formally recognised by ITUC Africa and OATUU. There is a danger that sub-regional organisations such as SATUCC and EATUCC focus mainly on delivering TU positions on regional issues to regional bodies like SADC, EAC and ECOWAS. The so called consultative status of a Trade Union Organisation in a supranational organisation like SADC is certainly not enough to become a regional trade union organisation or movement with regional political clout. There are also signs that national union federations do not pay much attention to sub-regional work and hardly pay membership dues. Another striking fact is that sub-regional organisation like OTUWA and SATUCC want to become more inclusive by accommodating more than one national federation from each country. Often this merely means that rival national federations might come together in meetings of the sub-regional bodies but continue to act as bitter rivals at the national level. Sub-regional organisations thus will have discuss how they can facilitate greater trade union unity or at least better collaboration on common issues amongst different federations from the same country. The fragmentation amongst unions is worsened in West Africa where the union movement is split into the francophone and English speaking countries with French speaking countries usually having 5 to 8 national union centres.

Global Union Federations (GUFs) and Their Influence in Africa

There seems to still be a significant disconnect between ITUC-Africa and GUF. While ITUC-Africa focuses predominantly on influencing policies but also has programmes on organising and human and trade union rights, these programmes seem to be mostly an add-on for industrial unions on the continent. The GUFs on the other hand, focus more on direct worker participation in their campaigns and organising projects on multinationals. Most GUFs are still focusing predominantly on their own specific

programmes but the annual Africa GUF Forum has created the opportunity for meaningful exchanges geared towards improved common practices. They are also a platform for GUFs to engage with continental and sub-regional bodies to achieve greater coherence of approach (GUF 2014).

The GUFS currently cooperate with ITUC-Africa in a cordial manner but without a coherent joint programme of action. Both tend to implement their respective programmes and while informing one another, these programmes are not co-ordinated with each other in any systematic manner. Co-ordination is thus limited to some of the broader common goals like achieving respect for workers' and trade union rights or campaigning against precarious forms of employment. GUF Head offices usually determine some of the overall themes for their organisations (for example quality public services) but continental and regional structures still seem to have the space to determine their own priorities within this framework. Little meaningful linkages though seem to exist with sub regional bodies like SATUCC and EATUC.

The work of GUFs around MNCs seems to be amongst the most significant trade union activities on the continent. They respond to the global organisation of capital and bring workers together across borders in a much focused and thus meaningful manner. The shop stewards' alliances are of special importance in this regard with Shoprite Checkers, Pick n' Pay, AngloGold etc. providing interesting (and encouraging) case studies (GUF 2014).

GUFs in Africa are clearly most relevant to their affiliated industrial unions while the relationship with national federations is limited. The GUF strategies of combining recruitment with research, education and campaign holds perhaps the greatest promise for improving trade union work on the continent in the years to come in dealing to the neo-liberal narrative.

Challenges of Trade Unions in Africa and Strategies for Change and Renewal

Most internal audit reports reviewed on African trade unions capacities (NALEDI 2009; FES 2008; ILO 2010; SATUCC 2017; Kalusopa 2011) present a complex and evolving challenges that call for complete renewal if these organisations are to survive. In this section, we describe these in the context of organisational characteristics (representativeness, internal

democracy, resources campaign capabilities, solidarity attitudes, social dialogue involvement, and relation with political parties).

It clear and evident from literature reviewed that the transformation processes in terms of evolution, growth and decline of trade unionism in Africa could well be closely linked to the changes in the global capitalist production system, state policies, composition of the workforces and the internal trade union organisational structural dynamics and democracy (NALEDI 2009; FES 2008; ILO 2010; SATUCC 2017). The literature also underscores the diversity that can be found across various countries in the African region with regard to the functioning of trade unions and the degree of operation and challenges thereof (ILO 2010). In analysing this, it is instructive to assert that there is need for strategies that African trade unions should embrace in terms of internal characteristics and dynamics of union membership growth; union governance, trade union pluralism and proliferation; trade union representativeness and democracy; trade union-political relationships; financial independence and investments, workers' solidarity, international cooperation. These are discussed in the proceeding sections.

Trade Union Membership Growth

Relevant studies affirm that currently the neo-liberal economic agenda and globalisation has had a negative impact on trade union organisations in most African countries in terms of decline in density and union influence (FES 2008; Jauch 2003; ILO 2010; SATUCC 2017). Most of the countries have union density of between 10–20% (SATUCC 2017). This trade union density decline could be attributed to several factors such as: slow growth of the economy, failing to create jobs, retrenchments, and generally poor organisation as well as recruitment strategies employed to unionise members in Africa (Kalusopa and Otoo 2013). The strongest and most stable sector over the years in terms of union's growth has been public sector affiliates. They have had much more stable leadership, much more secured incomes and hence financially strong (Kalusopa and Otoo 2013). The second can be said to be the mining and energy sector unions which despite having lost membership over time due to retrenchments in the mining sector continues to be one of the most financially stable trade unions (Kalusopa and Otoo 2013). The trade unions with larger membership potential are those in the services sector such as wholesale, food, retail and construction. However, these are also the sectors where employment

is insecure and wages too low (Kalusopa and Otoo 2013). Membership contributions are irregular, low and insignificant to keep these unions afloat. The weakest trade unions seem to those in the agricultural sector, private security and domestic work (Kalusopa and Otoo 2013). These trade unions are not only weak organisationally, but their members are the most exploited in terms of working conditions and incomes. There is rivalry and competition for membership by the unions splinters in the formal public and private sectors with no clear strategy to deal with the growing insecure unorganised service industry and informal economy (Kalusopa and Otoo 2013). In fact most of the trade union affiliates do not have functional databases for membership tracking and growth projections over years (Kalusopa 2011).

Going forward, it is therefore recommended that trade unions need to:

- Develop a clear ideological framework and firm alternative positions to counter neo-liberal economic globalisation and embark on workers education to sensitise the workers on the effects of globalisation and specifically the privatisation and outsourcing.
- Develop well targeted organisational and recruitment agenda that focuses on strengthening recruitment in the formal public sectors and extending this to the unorganised service industries and agriculture which have a weak membership base.
- Improve the amalgamation mechanisms to strengthen the national labour structures so as to counter exploitation in service industry and agriculture which have a weak membership base.
- Establish information labour management systems such as databases/databanks for easy access to membership statistics, collective bargaining trends, etc.
- Step up efforts in social dialogue to advocate for an economically living minimum wage for the vulnerable workers across the sectors.
- Work with global union federations and advance the protection of workers from globalisation onslaught in such sector such as construction and service sectors.

Trade Union Structural Characteristic, Governance and Administration

This paper affirms that greater challenge exists for most trade unions is on various dimensions of trade union governance, namely: union democracy, representation, and participation. In most cases, trade unions have reported challenges of internal union democracy, ineffective representation and poor member participation (Kalusopa and Otoo 2013; SATUCC 2017). The situations vary considerably in scale and complexity, depending on the historic development of the country concerned, the legal, political and democratic context and the trade union movement's own internal regulations and attitudes. Nonetheless, it is possible to draw overall and common conclusions. Thus, for example, several audits or studies carried out on the continent by the Africa Labour Research Network (ALRN)[5] over the past decade clearly show that on various dimensions of governance (union democracy, representation, and participation), most of the trade unions and their affiliates showed poor union democracy, ineffective representation and poor membership participation.

Going forward, it would be useful for trade union to:

- Engage in continuous capacity building to enhance the knowledge and skills in negotiations, conflict management, budgeting of the union leadership.
- Advocates for the democratisation of trade unions to entrench members' control. In that context, an ideological framework plays a decisive role in the strengthening the substance of trade union members' role, right and responsibility of making informed decisions. The ideological framework can also strengthens and enhance the relationship between union leaders and members. In addition, it could assist in promoting worker empowerment, a sense of participation and an increased understanding between employers and employees.

Trade Union Pluralism, Proliferation and Workers Solidarity

For the past decades, the systemic promotion of neo-liberal narrative has been accompanied by the growing individualism among trade unions that has undermined the future, strength and relevance of the trade union movement (ANSA 2006). This is because trade union gains depend on largely the willingness and capacity to join forces in solidarity and focus on

common objectives and challenges of a particular time. In most cases, trade unions in Africa have reported trivial policy differences and personal ambitions or interests which heavily compromised trade union structures, unity in strategies, action and response to the collective needs and aspirations of workers in an efficient and responsible manner (ILO 2010). Though the freedom to associate and bargain has flourished in most countries allowing workers to freely choose the type of trade union organisation that is most suited to defending their interests, in many cases this has undermined workers' solidarity (ILO 2010). In most of the African countries where the excessive proliferation of trade unions has taken place, it is not realistic to expect the leaders of all splinter unions to agree in the short term to move towards structural realignment and reunification. Many studies (FES 2008; ILO 2010,; SATUCC 2017) show that trade union fragmentation is not only manifested through multiplicity existence of a number of duplications of trade union structures but also equally the result of a lack of structural links and coherence between unions at the lower levels in the trade union pyramid (for example, where branch and enterprise unions are not affiliated to federations and federations are not affiliated to any confederation). Yet, trade unions are supposed to provide a collective voice in solidarity for the productivity of the work place. Trade unionism requires unwavering focus, commitment and dedication. It entails personal self-sacrifice and putting others before self (Kalusopa 2011). There is need to have an inner belief to face confrontations, challenges and not to betray the trust that workers bestow on the leadership. This is can only happen if there is a clear ideological framework (Kalusopa 2011).

In that regard, if trade unions have to remain relevant, they have to:

- Channel efforts at pursuing unity in diversity and promoting solidarity which remains the cornerstones of a successful the trade union movement through various innovative forms of inter-union cooperation which strengthen the cohesion and effectiveness of trade union unity.
- Bring pressure to bear on splinter in-house small unions so that they join initiatives for more effective and structured unity in action regarding all issues on which common trade union action can be achieved or envisaged.

- Restructure and consolidate union structures through some deliberate efforts towards the merging of different types of unions into bigger and stronger sectoral unions.
- Ensure the proper exchange of information and consultation among themselves and with the lower echelons in their own organisations.
- Ensure that the rank and file members and activists are informed of such mergers and their value at designated structures such as congresses.
- Adopt of clear and equitable internal rules that include provisions for a regularly rotating leadership positions, setting and preparation of agendas and sharing of the human, financial and material costs. It is cardinal that there are constitutional limits placed on union leadership.
- Initiate processes that are targeted at convincing splinter groups to join the more genuine and representative organisations. Such efforts must propose unification of trade union structures rather than alliances based on leadership quests.
- Develop comprehensive and successful strategy with clear and well-thought-out plans of action.

Trade Union Internal Democracy and Transparency

Internal trade union democracy and transparency are among the most vital cornerstones of a viable and effective trade union organisation. They are indispensable elements not only for the preservation of the organisation's integrity, effective functioning, internal cohesion and discipline, but also for the respect and credibility of the organisation among the workers and its general public image. Literature and reports reviewed established that most countries in Africa have fairly sound legal framework to guide the functioning of trade unions. However, most of the trade unions, reported challenges with the implementation of their trade unions constitutions, clarity in election of their leaders on regular basis, entrenched "chieftainship" of leaders, and showed an incapacity to keep records and manage their constitutional obligations. The studies also affirmed evidence of poor balance in gender representation, poor national spread in the frequency of meetings within the structures, undermined local shop steward structures and inadequate technical staffing in the unions (NALEDI 2009; FES 2008; ILO 2010; SATUCC 2017).

In order for trade union to strategically renew and survive, it is important that:

- Internal democracy must be conceived and applied in a spirit of participative manner democracy, in which workers' control is at the centre and workers be the must be a principal actor and advocate.
- The principles, the rules and the outcomes of democratic decision-making have to be accepted and respected by all actors with regard to the results of trade union leadership elections.
- There must be clear and consistent constitutional guidelines and a set of rules which go with the mandate, management of trade union activities. The internal rules should determine the terms of the political and administrative responsibilities and accountability of the leadership.
- The management and monitoring of financial assets should be particularly strictly monitored in a transparent manner with clear up-to-date rules and regulations.

Dealing with Trade Unions and Politics

Trade union and political action go hand in hand in the defence of workers' and trade union rights. However, disproportionate political ambitions and involvement in party politics on the part of trade union leaders, serving personal interests rather than the cause of workers and the union, have caused a lot of damage and division within ranks of the trade union movement (ILO 2010). Many unions have now merely become conduits of political capture and mobilisation for ruling political parties. The results of such relationships – where they exist – between unions and their leaders on the one hand and political parties on the other should be openly debated and assessed at trade union congresses and other governing bodies. As a result, several national trade union centres have not been successful in their efforts to redefine the objective boundaries between trade unionism and party politics. Most study findings (FES 2008; Kalusopa and Otoo 2013; SATUCC 2017), suggest that the trade union-political party relationship is not membership driven, not well thought out, ad hoc, unstable and in flaccid state. This means that political activism on the part of trade unions remains a challenge in Africa. This then calls for trade unions to adopt the following recommendations:

- Trade unions should develop a strategic working document on their role in politics which should be endorsed by the general membership in various Congresses.

- Based on the strategic working document, work on the modalities of political activism (i.e. whether to support a particular political party, candidate, or decampaign others)
- Trade unions should embark on workers political education on their role in the political process.

Financial Independence and Organisation

There are mixed perceptions regarding the benefits of trade union investments to general membership (Kalusopa and Otoo 2013). On one hand, the union leadership who are in control of these investments argue that they are beneficial to members. On the other hand, the general membership, although not against such investments, are critical of how these investments are managed for the benefit of worker. Questions of loss of focus to plough resources for the cause of workers have been raised.

Therefore, trade union should:

- Put in place investment strategies guided by social considerations through creating an investment framework that would be approved by general membership.
- Have financial information so that there is clarity on company ownership (directorship), business strategies including business deals.
- Have clear structures clarifying the link between the companies and the accountable organs of the unions such as the finance and investment committees.
- Appointments to run investment companies should be on merit.

Coping with Newer and Global Workers Challenges

The growing importance and impact of globalisation, of macroeconomic and macro labour policies and of precarious types of work and employment and the overwhelming dominance of the informal economy are only some of the major issues to which trade unions are called upon to respond in a contemporary neo-liberal environment. The adaptation and strengthening of trade union capacities in terms of expertise, training, research and networking as well as for developing adequate policies and strategies, require an enormous investment of resources, which are scarcely available.

Therefore, if trade unions are to play any meaningful role against this background, there need for:

- Clarity and joint action by trade unions on common global thorny issues such migration, portability of social protection, regional trade, women rights, child labour, educational qualification frameworks. Such trade union positions and unity in action are also essential in connection with a variety of regional, sub-regional and international opportunities.
- Treating as a priority issue strengthening the membership and preservation of their representativeness and credibility as a workers' movement through organising the informal workers. For example, there are already numerous efforts by progressive organisations which regional trade union body like SATUCC put in place in the place to align to such informal organisation such as STREETNET that requires to be deepened. In that regard, national trade unions should adapt the constitutions and rules of engagement in order to accommodate the informal economy organisations. The question of affiliation fees will need attention in this context as well.
- Entrenching the creation of stronger alliances through cooperation with like-minded women NGOs and other civil society organisations (such as rural workers' associations) must be positively considered. Though limited in finance and scope many positive examples already exist throughout Africa and simply require guidelines and concrete action plans.
- Entrenching women trade unionist and young workers that offer the greatest potential for the broadening of the base and membership of trade unions. Women and young trade unionists must therefore be encouraged with all possible means to join trade union structures and activities at all levels. Incompatibilities between women's family responsibilities and their participation in trade union activities (for example, with regard to the time and location of activities and meetings) must be addressed more effectively.
- Adopting and enhancing gender sensitive policies in general. Many excellent strategies and action plans have been developed for this purpose and need not be mentioned here.

Regional and International Cooperation and Solidarity

A major requirement in this connection is that international, regional and national donor partners must channel their cooperation – multilateral as well as bilateral – to a maximum extent through joint trade union

structures and initiatives. Ideally, this would mean working with and through joint trade union platforms.

Therefore going forward, trade unions should:

- Allocate resources with a view to giving priority support to unification-oriented activities has to be given serious consideration. This may not be easy, as it may require reviewing longstanding preferences and privileged relationships, outdated and ideologically based choices and routine programmes, among other things. However, the overriding interest should be that of building strong and effective trade unions in the many African countries.
- Seek structured unity in action at the sectoral level with the GUFS should be sought for the further expansion and improvement of these activities.

Conclusion

Like elsewhere in the world, the role of trade union organisations has developed for historical and ideological reasons in advancing the cause of workers and the society at large. Suffice to say, trade unions still remain a vehicle that can be used to effectively advance the workers cause in the Africa region. However, currently, they remain declining and inert organisations that have numerous challenges which have made them fail to deliver on their mandate of being the "vanguard" of the workers' struggle in the Africa region. This is clearly demonstrated by the admission of many trade unions of their in capacity to engage meaningfully in tripartite arrangements with structures of national government as well as on the regional and international fronts. This is because, it is only a modern, strong and progressive trade union that can be able to mobilise workers in solidarity on socio-economic issues that affect them and play a pivotal role in the face of globalisation. To achieve this it is key that there is clarity about where trade unions stand, the forces ranging against the strategic interests of the working class; who their allies are; and last but not least clarity about the international ideological warfare and what their role is in it.

This paper has presented an overview of the current state of affairs in which trade unions find themselves in the African region. Both external and internal factors that have directly or indirectly impacted negatively and positively on effectiveness of trade unions in the achievement of workers

interests have been discussed. External challenges include: forces of globalisation that undermine trade union growth and development; adversarial union relationship; weak union-political party relationship; and nascent trade union international linkages. Internal challenges identified in the study relates to poor governance characterised by lack of union democracy, limited representation and participation. In addition, there were concerns about non-functioning union structures such as working committees and shop stewards. Another notable internal challenge was that, although financial investments were institutionalised, they were fraught with weak accountability and transparency mechanisms.

The paper recommends, among other suggestions, strengthening of state-trade union relationship; establishment of clearer union-political party linkage; building stronger collaboration between trade unions and other like-minded stakeholder; development of a clearer workers ideology to counter the influence of globalisation; strengthening the three federations in terms of international networking; enhancing governance and building a strong union administrative capacity. This underscores the need for ideological clarity so that trade unions adopt a proactive approach and a play a pivotal role in their countries and the region. They should also direct efforts towards globalised trade unionism in the face of increasing assaults by global capital.

Notes

1. The ICFTU is now called the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), formed on 1 November 2006 out of the merger with the World Confederation of Labour (WCL).
2. Before 1975; factions of it i.e. the left-leaning unions
3. These include: the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, 1964; SWAFP & Labour Party, 1963/64; Nigeria Labour Party, 1989; Social-Democratic Party, 1990 & Labour Party, 2002
4. See   https://www.tralac.org/news/article/5914-cosatu-attends-brics-trade-union-forum.html
5. ALRN is a network of distinguished African labour researchers. It has since 2001 provided radical labour analysis of trends, issues and social processes in Africa. It sustains a critical analysis of the nature of labour, power and the state in Africa in the context of capitalist globalisation.

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