

# Reflecting on Struggles for Decent Work in Africa: Challenges, Opportunities and Outcomes

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# Introduction

- According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), labour income in many developing countries remains below pre-pandemic levels. In 2020, the global economy started experiencing inflation levels not seen in almost 40 years. With high inflation, the global cost-of-living crisis has hit the most vulnerable hardest. According to the ILO, for the first time over the last 15 years, workers' real wages have declined - by 0.9% in the first half of 2022.
- Furthermore, legal restrictions and violations of trade union rights, such as the right to organize and to bargain collectively, are widespread. This affects trade unions' ability to organize, to represent and to service workers. Not surprisingly, trade union membership is lower where there are violations of trade union rights.
- Added to that, our trade unions movement in Africa is faced with trade unions proliferation and fragmentation which led to a multiplicity of trade union purporting to represent workers.
- Political and business interference in trade union affairs
- Aging trade unions leaders, non inclusive and patriarchal organizations
- In a world affected by the dire consequences of climate changes and deepening inequalities, and an ever-changing world of work, how do we empower trade unions for future impact? How do we revitalize unions to be inclusive, representative and democratic organizations that fight for all workers?

- But before addressing the issue of trade unions revitalization, I'd like to share with you the possible scenarios if they don't transform..
- Scenario 1: Marginalization
  - The combination of decreasing rates of unionization in combination with aging and non-inclusive and non-democratic TU, which may result in the gradual marginalization of TU.
- Scenario 2: Dualization
  - TU defend their position, servicing workers closest to them with formal employment in big sectors or public sectors. And this will come at a cost of other workers in the informal sector or workers in less representative sectors.
- Scenario 3: Replacement
  - TU face competition from other civil movement organizations, informal agencies, lawyers etc...

# Trade union revitalization and gender

- Trade Union revitalization
- Trade unions find innovative tactics and defend all workers to strengthen inclusive and effective social dialogue.
- I will emphasize on the following by referring to the ILO centenary declaration on the future of work:
  - (i) ensuring a just transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions.
  - (ii) promoting workers' rights as a key element for the attainment of inclusive and sustainable growth, with a focus on freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining as enabling rights.
  - (iii) achieving gender equality at work through a transformative agenda, with regular evaluation of progress made, which: - ensures equal opportunities, equal participation and equal treatment, including equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value
- We need a transformative agenda to ensure workers in the informal sector workers, care economy and gig economy are included.

# Cont.

- Our union structures and ways that we work today need to change if we are to meet the challenges of organizing changing workplaces. As supply chains have expanded, work has been outsourced and made precarious and unions represent a shrinking core of permanent workers (the pie is ever getting smaller).
- The survival of the trade union movement depends on our capacity to transform our structures and priorities to meet the needs of workers in new forms of employment in a changing world of work. The current trade union model is an old model that is more than 70 years old and is based on previous industrial revolutions. There is an imperative to transform this model considering the future of work. This calls for new strategies and innovations. Artisanal Small Scale Mining project in Zambia- The garage workers association in Kenya members of the Amalgamated union of Kenya
- Organizing and servicing new members, such as young workers or workers in the informal or gig economy. Special emphasis be put on women effective representation in decision making structures and collective bargaining teams to advocate for women specific issues at the workplace.
- With a youth population well above 60%, there is urgent need to rejuvenate trade unions in Africa to reflect the growing needs and challenges of young workers.

# Cont.

- Ensuring sound internal governance, through a transparent set of rules that governs the mandate, management, elections and activities of trade unions
- Strengthening effective and inclusive social dialogue on the issues of today and tomorrow.
- Yet in this context of multiple transitions, with trade unions are faced with so many serious challenges, they have shown great resilience and a remarkable capability to revitalize themselves in innovative ways. This bodes well for the future. Strong trade unions are needed now more than ever to build a world of work founded on sustainable development that ensures decent work for all.
- Fostering gender inclusion, promoting equal opportunities, and addressing biases are essential for creating a future-ready workforce where everyone can thrive

# Reflecting trade union actions in addressing inequalities

- Gender inequality continues to have a significant impact on the future of work.
- Many positive experiences exist of trade unions that revitalize and transform through providing innovative services and representing those workers that need it the most, through advocating on those topics that matter, or through entering into campaigns and networks with other unions and civil society.
- Trade unions defending women's rights and advocating for closing the gender pay gap are considered as positive examples of trade unions revitalization, addressing the needs of vulnerable workers on those topics that matter and there are.
- Discrimination
- Occupational segregation which is the distribution of workers across and within occupations, based upon demographic characteristics, most often gender. Other types of occupational segregation include racial and ethnicity segregation, and sexual orientation segregation
- Undervaluing of women's work
- Women's care roles and motherhood
- Gender-based violence and harassment
- Trade unions must ensure a conducive environment free of violence and harassment, and that supports their growth with the union various structures including decision making bodies

# Future of work and technology

- New technology, artificial intelligence, automation, mobility, new behaviour patterns, and the gig economy are changing the dynamics of work and the skills required. Harnessing these technologies presents both opportunities for creating gender-equal economic opportunities for women, as well as important challenges. Women in particular stand to gain or lose from the future of work due to persistent gender inequality
- As automation, robotics, and AI become common in workplaces, gender bias may exacerbate existing inequities.
- Understanding these impacts is crucial for creating equitable workplaces.
- Mosseri, S, Cooper, R and Foley, M. (2020) The future of work and gender: Insight paper, WGEA Commissioned Research Paper, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
- Foregrounding gender illuminates three important themes when considering the future of work: representation, recognition and rights. Women and men are likely to experience the future of work differently due to entrenched occupational segregation. Women, on average, perform more routine tasks than men, putting their jobs at high risk of automation. , and without significant investment in women's education, training and development, they are likely to be excluded from emergent opportunities within the new economy.
- Emergent work forms affect the rights of women and men in distinct ways, with women particularly vulnerable to the consequences of unpredictable or continuous work schedules, unregulated data collection, biased automation and unprotected workspaces.
- Attention to these areas is needed to create a more gender-equitable future of work



# Future of work and technology

- At the other end of the spectrum - high-value, high-growth jobs in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) have proven difficult for women to break into in large numbers due to persistent social norms that challenge their entry and success in these fields (Charles, 2017; Sassler et al., 2017; Malmström et al., 2018).
- Until such gender barriers are addressed, STEM is likely to remain male dominated
- Moving forward, reskilling will be needed to address gaps between existing and required skills.
- McKinsey Global Institute, 2019). In many low- and middle-income countries, reskilling for the digital age is even more difficult for women due to obstructed access to mobile phones and the internet...exacerbating by the lack of access to electricity
- Addressing women's (and other marginalised groups) technical access and skill deficiencies is therefore critical in order to harness the full potential of the digital economy (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019; Ramaphosa and Löfven, 2019)

# Future of work and technology

- At the same time, feminised fields such as healthcare, education and social assistance have low risk for automation and are predicted to grow in the future, but many of the jobs are defined by low pay and poor working conditions. Women continue to be largely excluded from high-quality jobs in STEM that are poised to shape the future of work.
- Women are less likely to receive on-the-job training or educational incentives, compared to men, due to their overrepresentation in low-skill, low-pay jobs.
- Historically, women have performed a disproportionate degree of invisible and undervalued labour, and recent analyses identify gender pay gaps driven by both persistent and new employment mechanisms.
- Work flexibility is increasing, but this flexibility does not always benefit women. Women are more likely than men to be exposed to destabilizing, employer-driven flexibility as opposed to more family-friendly, employee-driven flexibility. Additionally, while ICTs expand where and when work can be done, they can also facilitate continuous work cycles that undermine work-family balance and worker well-being. Example working from home

# Conclusion

- Attention to these areas is needed to create a more gender-equitable future of work
  - 11 Key Areas of Improvement
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- RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
  - EQUAL PAY AND WAGES
  - PROMOTION
  - TRAINING
  - INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS
  - WORK-LIFE BALANCE
  - PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER BASED HARASSMENT
  - SUPPLY CHAINS
  - LGBTI
  - CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND
  - EMPLOYEE PROTECTION

# Hope for the future

Even neo-liberal economists are recognizing the importance of trade unions considering the global cost of living and wages crisis

I will end by saying quoting a Nobel price Laureat, Prof Emeritus Angus Deaton:

- “Like most of my age cohort, I long regarded unions as a nuisance that interfered with economic (and often personal) efficiency and welcomed their slow demise. But today large corporations have too much power over working conditions, wages, and decisions in Washington, where unions currently have little say compared with corporate lobbyists. Unions once raised wages for members and nonmembers, they were an important part of social capital in many places, and they brought political power to working people in the workplace and in local, state, and federal governments. Their decline is contributing to the falling wage share, to the widening gap between executives and workers, to community destruction, and to rising populism..... unions need to be at the table for decisions about artificial intelligence. Economists’ enthusiasm for technical change as the instrument of universal enrichment is no longer tenable (if it ever was).”