

TENTH ANNUAL CENTER FOR GLOBAL WORKERS' RIGHTS (CGWR)



SPRING SYMPOSIUM: OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTCOMES

THE CHALLENGES FOR UNIONISATION IN GHANA

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Introduction



Task assigned

Provide an overview of unionisation challenges in Ghana,

Citing examples of:

Successes and

Lessons learned

Union challenges in Ghana



Neoliberal work restructuring [from ISI to EP-export promotion]

Inversion of labour's privileged developmental position

Resulting in labour market informalisation

Altering and dwindling traditional union membership

Impacting union internal democracy

Causing union pluralism [poaching and fragmentation]

Labour market informalisation



Workplace restructuring trends Downsizing, Outsourcing, Fragmentation, contracting and Sub-contracting, PPP

Employment forms: Contractor, Casual, Temporal, Seasonal, Part-time, piece work, family labour, children at work,

De-concentrates and reposition workers in different aggregations

Allow companies to renege on their responsibilities towards workers who serve their direct production needs

Blurs the notion of a common employer common exploiter, breaks solidarity spirit weakening basis for union mobilisation.

Representation and participation



Gender democratic deficit

Women's double labour market disadvantage

Union goal convergence with women's workplace concerns

Union patriarchal structures [male worker/dependent wife and children]

Young workers: high unemployment despite increased formal education

Current workforce concentrated in vulnerable work

Informal employment, international migrant without proper documentation

Entrepreneurship debate to pathologise those unable to find work



Leadership crisis: leaders' desires and members' interests leading to an

Explosion of union numbers directed by **poaching and splintering** of existing unions not the unorganised

UNIONS' RESPONSE TO NEO-LIBERAL CHALLENGES

Organisational restructuring administrative, governing and consultative organs

Connecting consultative bodies and governing organs to shift union action away from leadership to members

Easing administrative oversight of the secretariat

Policy engagement

National: Legislation, policies, budget review

International: Trade agreements, EPAs, AfTCA

Alliances to mediate external conditions with **strategic partnerships**:

State, political parties,

Religious/faith based

Civil society groups trade rules

National labour movement [organised labour front]

Improving union relevance [do things that endear the unions to the people]

Services: housing packages, mutual and provident funds, health schemes

Generating income to be self reliant: setting up banks, hostels, conferencing facilities, labour brokerage

Membership expansion recruitment [organise the unorganised]

Women, informal economy workers and young workers

Strategy Outcomes



Note the dangers of internal democracy to labour's ability to counter globalisation challenges

Diluting union political orientation

Confusing relations between members and their unions:

- Membership demands

- Site of union militancy

- Union consciousness: contact with and ownership of unions

- Leadership attitude: complacency, accountability and succession

Context shaping union challenge



Global existential crises

Environmental and pandemics

Politically motivated conflict and the threat of a 3rd world war

Palestine, Russia/Ukraine, China, North Korea,

(Cuba and Venezuela)

Western sanctions, financial transactions, Fuel and energy price hikes, supply chain disruptions

African states on the verge of collapse: Sudan, Somalia, DR

Congo, Nigeria, Francophone Africa

Commodification, technology and the world of work

Success in meeting the needs of [diverse] workers will amplify the ... presence [of unions] on the national economic scene [for] greater legitimacy in the lives of working people in Ghana

This will depend on the ability of unions and their members
‘...to focus on the real cause of their economic conditions,
[away from the] direct material benefits from their unions’.

(Britwum, 2022)

Concluding chapter of

Britwum, Akua O (2022) *Trades Union Congress Ghana: Seventy-Five Years of Achievements, Challenges and Prospects*. Accra: Digibooks