



## PSI Participants' Report on ITUC-Africa Regional Forum on Moving Africa's Development & Industrialization Agenda Forward: Trade Union Alternatives (Accra, Ghana, 23–25 September 2013)

### INTRODUCTION

The meeting was well attended by both English and French speaking countries (30) across the Africa region; the delegation was composed of union leaders. The forum was lively and full of experience-sharing, but above all most of the economic justice issues discussed related to the World Social Forum (Tunisia, March 2013) seminars PSI members had attended (financial transactions tax/Robin Hood Tax and tax justice seminars) which made it very easy for our team to actively participate in the deliberations.

The panellists were composed of men and women with a wealth of experience and knowledge in their respective professions and fields of experience.

*The business of the meeting was drawn from seven challenges facing the African continent:*

#### **1) Fifty years after independence – the role of non-state actors in shaping Africa's transformation:-**

- The presenter (a law scholar) who also had a wealth of experience in labour matters after having served in national and international labour-related institutions (Geneva), moved the meeting strongly on issues which summarized the discussions which were to follow thereafter.
- The professor strongly moved the meeting on the unions' need for continued struggle for good governance using the ***fundamental ILO Conventions*** which had always been used ***as instruments of justice in political fields.***
- The conventions referred to were ***Conventions no. 87, 98, 100 and 111*** among others which have shaped political gains in the whole world e.g. discrimination in employment, equal employment opportunities for equal pay. Most of these conventions have been echoed in the western and African countries' statutes but the unions are not making good use of the same – to the disadvantage of the members.
- The presenter further emphasized the need for trade unions to continue fighting capitalism and the excess of greed and exploitation.
- It was also noted that the principals of the ***decent work agenda does not only ask for reasonable pay but go beyond and demand for dignified pay*** (the pay that can sustain and

cushion employees from financial imbalances caused by inflation and other issues beyond workers' control).

- The culture of corporate self-regulation was among the reasons cited to constitute unfair labour practice in the world – giving the example of the **Chernobyl** nuclear plant where, as a result of long strenuous hours of work, employees slept when on duty.
- Contractual labour is slowly creeping back into the labour market despite its negative effects on labour practices; therefore unions must stand firm to protect workers' rights.
- The notion of private institutions (sector) making profits more than public sectors is wrong. This has led to selling off public institutions - some of them for nothing at the expense of citizens. This should be a thing of the past since ***privatization was not born by tripartite consultation but was a creation of self-interest by employers and governments assisted by IMF and WORLD BANK.***
- It was further noted that most governments had resorted to approaching issues with open mouths other than open minds - hence selling and or privatization of government/ public institutions, contrary to the wishes of citizens.
- It was noted with concern that African states have resorted to spying on each other with a view to offer cheap space for investors at the expense of the citizens and or workers.
- For unions to survive they have to import new instruments in action e.g. research and experiment without fear the alternatives provided, thus being proactive.

## 2) MAPPING AFRICA TRADE UNIONS – POST-2015 MDGs NEEDED (2063)

- The presenter informed the meeting that the Millennium Development Goals had no contribution from Africa, hence the confusion to implement it in Africa; and therefore the only alternative was for Africa to ***present its agenda to UN Summit in New York for deliberation and consideration.***
- ***That lack of proper indicators and targets in the MDGs*** had seriously slowed the achievements of the same hence rapid growth of the informal economy in Africa.
- ***That for any development to succeed it must be all-inclusive.***
- Other factors which affect the MDGs achievements are the issue of social protection which has not been addressed adequately by social partners.
- Unions were advised to build future scenarios on research.

## 3) SOCIAL PROTECTION

- Mechanism of implementation was one of challenges noted to be affecting Africa.
- It was also noted that Africa was still dwelling on old traditions of survival and therefore there is a need for Africa to change to modern ways of doing business and farming.
- That there was a need for Africa to work on costs of implementation but with long term program, but only to borrow short term.

- The need for Africa to be specific on implementation of issues was also emphasized.

#### **4) AFRICA MINING VISION & ALTERNATIVE GROWTH PATH FOR AFRICA**

- ✓ The adoption of the same was done in 2009 by **African Union**
- ✓ The action plan was further rolled out in 2011.
- ✓ A paradigm shift both in theory and practice was noted.
- ✓ The recovery of the mining sector in Africa countries was noted to require a shift in government objectives towards primary objectives of maximizing tax revenue.

#### **5) UNIVERSAL SOCIAL PROTECTION**

- ❖ Transfer informal economy to formal structure.
- ❖ Issues of corruption to be addressed adequately.
- ❖ The idea of outsourcing services was realized to have been the cause to rapid growth of informal sector. It was condemned to be an unfair labour practice.
- ❖ HIV stigmatization was realized to be a challenge in African countries and therefore should be addressed with a lot of consideration.

#### **6) FINANCING AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TAX JUSTICE**

This item was discussed at length whereby the following issues emerged:-

- Most African countries tax returns indicate taxations realized from workers exceed that realized from investors
- Lack of proper utilization or accountability of revenue generated from taxation, thus leading to corruption.
- Lack of awareness in tax justice.
- Tax exemption to investors at the expense of workers.
- Tax dodging - hence misuse of resource.
- Need for joint campaigns and sensitization at the country level, sub-region, regional and global levels.
- Need for special day to advocate for tax justice e.g. May Day.

#### **7) POINTS TO NOTE**

- That there is a need for Africa to act on issues on priority basis.
- That Africa must create labour-friendly indicators in order to be precise.
- The ITUC communiqué be presented to Regional Congress for consideration and adoption.
- That the priority of Africa should be industrialization.
- That the recommendations be presented to Global Unions, Sub-regional blocks and or any other progressive partners.
- That there is a need for total commitment for Africa to succeed (the times for boardroom meetings and paper work is long gone) and people should champion implementation of ILO Conventions, Recommendations etc.
- That there is a need for unions to form alliances.

#### **8) SUMMARY**

- ❖ Most of our team's recommendations were adopted by the forum.

- ❖ The knowledge earned by PSI delegates during the World Social Forum in Tunisia this year made our PSI team perform better – since on tax issues our team was already several miles ahead of the rest.
- ❖ **The PSI-sponsored team was small in number but very aggressive in participation. This prompted ActionAid Africa, among other organisations, to promise to contact PSI affiliates in Kenya with an aim of championing the tax justice agenda in Kenya, Sub-Region and Region.**
- ❖ It is important for PSI keep track of follow-ups for purposes of future progress.
- ❖ It is our suggestion that PSI consider facilitating a team to attend these joint forums in order to sensitize unions on the concept of tax justice. This concept is the best tool for unions at this time of privatization.