



## The 14<sup>th</sup> Edition of the ITUC-Africa New Year School

**Theme : Advancing Africa's Transformation Agenda: Mobilizing for Tangible Trade Union Collective Action**

**Date: 19-22 March 2024**

**Venue: Lusaka, Zambia**

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### **THE CONCEPT NOTE**

#### **I Background**

ITUC-Africa has since 2011 developed the tradition of organising during the first quarter of each year a Trade Union Leadership School dubbed the New Year School (NYS). The school aims at discussing and reflecting on contemporary social, economic and political matters affecting Africa and has covered a number of thematic areas including African emancipation, regional integration, sustainable development, trade union renewal and unity, among others. For the year 2024, the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of NYS will be held under the theme “*Advancing Africa’s Transformation Agenda: Mobilizing for Tangible Trade Union Collective Action*”.

Africa finds itself at a critical crossroads, undergoing significant socio-economic shifts that necessitate cohesive and strategic actions. At the heart of this transformation journey are trade unions, positioned as pivotal drivers of tangible collective action that can propel Africa’s transformational agenda. The multifaceted role of trade unions across key focal areas assumes paramount importance in shaping and navigating Africa’s future landscape. The unity and organizational strength of trade unions serve as linchpins for bolstering collective action, contributing significantly to Africa’s transformative efforts. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) report in 2020, trade unions in Africa represent over 40 million workers, a force to be reckoned with in negotiating improved working conditions, advocating for labour rights, and fostering social dialogue. This unity among diverse unions amplifies their collective voice and enhances their capacity to engage with policymakers, contributing to broader social change.

One of the major hurdles in establishing and sustaining comprehensive social protection systems in Africa is the challenge posed by illicit financial flows and the subsequent burgeoning debt. According to the African Development Bank, Africa loses an estimated \$50 billion annually due to illicit financial flows, hampering the region's economic progress. This loss is equivalent to 3.7% of the continent's GDP, severely undermining the capacity to invest in social protection measures and alleviate poverty. Trade unions play a critical role in curbing these financial leaks through advocating for policies that promote transparency in fiscal practices and efficient resource reallocation toward bolstering robust social protection mechanisms.

The intersection of social protection financing and sovereign debt renewal in Africa presents a critical nexus fraught with multifaceted challenges that demand urgent attention. In many African nations, the need for robust social protection systems is undeniable, as these systems serve as vital mechanisms to shield vulnerable populations from economic shocks and ensure inclusive development. However, the escalating burden of sovereign debt restructuring threatens the sustainability and expansion of social protection schemes, thereby jeopardizing the welfare of millions. This challenge is exacerbated by the growing pressure on African governments to balance fiscal austerity measures in debt management with the imperative to strengthen social safety nets. The conundrum emerges from the trade-offs between debt repayment obligations and the essential need to bolster social protection systems, raising pertinent questions about prioritization, resource allocation, and long-term sustainability. According to the International Labour Organization, inadequate social protection coverage remains a significant concern across the continent, with only a fraction of the population having access to comprehensive protection measures<sup>1</sup>. The World Bank highlights the vulnerability of African economies to debt distress, emphasizing the urgent need for prudent debt management strategies to avoid compromising vital social expenditures<sup>2</sup>. This complex landscape demands a comprehensive exploration from a trade union perspective to discern viable solutions that safeguard both social protection financing and sustainable debt management in Africa.

Moreso, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) stands as a catalyst for transformation in regional economic integration and industrialization throughout the continent. Projections anticipate AfCFTA potentially lifting 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty and 68 million from moderate poverty by 2035. With its goal to establish a unified market for goods and services, AfCFTA's estimated combined GDP surpasses \$3.4 trillion, signifying an epoch of economic growth and job creation<sup>3</sup>. Trade unions, leveraging their influence, can advocate beyond supporting the African value chain and local industries. They can champion various pivotal areas such as advocating for skills development programs aligned with AfCFTA's demands to bolster the workforce's capabilities and mobility. Empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through easier access to finance and market linkages, particularly within the AfCFTA framework, aligns with union objectives. Ensuring

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization. (2021). Social protection in Africa: A comprehensive overview 2020. ILO.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank. (2020). World development report 2021: Data for better lives. World Bank.

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization. (2021). Social protection in Africa: A comprehensive overview 2020. ILO.

gender inclusivity, promoting women’s economic empowerment, and encouraging eco-friendly practices are equally vital pursuits. Additionally, prioritizing consumer protection, high-quality standards, and fostering technological integration and innovation are arenas where trade unions can foster positive impacts within the AfCFTA.

In 2021, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) published a study on “Investment in social protection: impacts on economic growth”. ITUC-Africa, building on all these, sees social protection for all as well as its financing as a central element of the new social contract in Africa. It has also commissioned studies, the last of which in 2022 focus on how to fill the financing gaps in social protection systems, to achieve universal social protection by 2030 titled “Financial Mechanisms for Social Protection Oriented Towards the Implementation of R 204 And Gender Mainstreaming: The Case of South Africa and Burkina Faso”. Additionally, ITUC-Africa published a Trade Union policy document to guide advocacy actions on funding for promotion and extension of social protection for all in Africa. These studies show ITUC-Africa’s commitment to the subject matter.

Just Transition is another area of concern. The African Trade Union Just Transition campaign embodies the vision of a sustainable future by advocating for a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy while ensuring workers’ rights and livelihoods are protected. This campaign aligns with global climate objectives and resonates strongly in Africa, where environmental challenges are particularly acute. The transition to renewable energy sources has the potential to create millions of new jobs while mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. By championing this cause, trade unions aim to ensure that workers are not left behind in this fundamental economic and environmental transformation.

While the ITUC-Africa is coming out of the congress with new elected leadership, the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the New Year School intends to build the capacity of the trade union constituencies in the areas of sovereign debt crisis, social protection financing, organizing trade union unity, AfCFTA for driving the African value chains for industrialization and advancing African Trade Union campaign.

Trade unions in Africa stand at the forefront of transformative initiatives, wielding substantial influence and agency across various domains. Their unity, strategic advocacy, and proactive engagement hold the promise of steering Africa’s socio-economic transformation towards a future marked by equitable development and sustainable growth.

## **2 Objectives of the School**

- *Foster Trade Union Unity and Organizational Strength* – Cultivate enhanced unity among trade unions, emphasizing organizational fortitude and collaborative action to bolster collective efficacy, ultimately advocating for labor rights and improved working conditions.
- *Address Illicit Financial Flows and Continuing Sovereign Debt Crisis* – Delve into the challenges posed by illicit financial flows and burgeoning sovereign debt, advocating for

policies that promote fiscal transparency and efficient resource reallocation to fortify robust social protection mechanisms. Additionally, examine the adverse impact of debt on essential sectors like healthcare, education, and social protection, seeking sustainable solutions. There is the need to drive discussions on achieving universal social protection by examining studies on financing gaps, mechanisms for social protection, and gender mainstreaming. Aim to build a new social contract in Africa, ensuring social protection for all and advocating for funding to extend these measures across the continent.

- *Maximize the Potentials of AfCFTA for Industrialization* – Explore avenues to harness the transformative potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by advocating for policies that support the African value chain, local industries, and job creation. Focus on initiatives like skills development aligned with AfCFTA demands, empowering SMEs, ensuring gender inclusivity, and fostering technological innovation within AfCFTA's framework.
- *Champion the African Trade Union Just Transition Campaign* – Advocate for a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources while ensuring workers' rights and livelihoods are safeguarded. Highlight the potential of renewable energy in job creation and mitigating climate change's adverse effects, emphasizing trade unions' roles in this economic and environmental transformation.
- *Enhance Capacities in Trade Union Leadership* – Strengthen the capacities of trade union constituencies in critical areas such as addressing the sovereign debt crisis, managing social protection financing, unifying trade unions, leveraging AfCFTA for industrialization, and advancing the African Trade Union campaign. Empower leaders to navigate the socio-economic challenges effectively.

### **3 Purpose and Thematic Areas**

To achieve these aims, the New Year School will:

- Strengthen inter-union collaboration and reinforce organizational structures to enhance unity and collective strength among trade unions across Africa.
- Explore strategies to curb illicit financial flows and address the challenges posed by mounting sovereign debt, advocating for policies that promote fiscal transparency and support robust social protection mechanisms.
- Strategize ways to optimize the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to propel industrialization, focusing on policies that bolster local industries, job creation, and skill development in alignment with AfCFTA goals.
- Champion the African Trade Union Just Transition campaign, emphasizing the shift to renewable energy sources while safeguarding workers' rights and promoting job creation in green sectors.
- Advocate for the extension and sustainable financing of social protection measures, identifying mechanisms to achieve universal social protection and gender mainstreaming across Africa.
- Enhance the leadership capacities of trade unions by providing training and support in critical areas such as addressing sovereign debt challenges, managing social protection

financing, leveraging AfCFTA for industrialization, and advancing the African Trade Union campaign.

The school therefore shall:

1. Briefly reflect without lamenting the current social and economic state in Africa as well as the one of governance and democracy on the continent.
2. Formulate a continental labour strategy to set the background of a new social contract for Africa.

Among others, the following key development themes will inform the agenda of the discussions during the 4 days of the school:

1. Organizing and Inter-Union Collaboration and Unity
2. Curbing Illicit Financial Flows and Sovereign Debt Reversal to Advance Social Protection Financing
3. Advancing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agenda to Develop an African Value Chain for Industrialization
4. Advancing the African Trade Union Just Transition Campaign Towards Sustainable and Decent jobs
5. Addressing Peace and Security Challenges and the State of Democracy and Human Rights in Africa today.

#### **4 Main Guiding Questions and Thematic Commissions**

Arising from the above-mentioned themes, the Program will be guided by the following Commissions and questions:

##### ***Commission 1: Organizing, Inter-Union Collaboration and Trade Union Unity***

1. What innovative strategies can be implemented to rejuvenate trade unions, ensuring they remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the evolving needs of workers?
2. What strategies can be implemented to bridge the gap between diverse unions and strengthen solidarity within the trade union movement?
3. In what ways can trade unions streamline their organizational structures to better serve the evolving needs of African workers and promote unity For example, How can trade Union include informal sector workers in their Unions?

##### ***Commission 2: Curbing Illicit Financial Flows and Sovereign Debt Crisis Reversal to Advance Social Protection Financing***

1. What are the root causes of illicit financial flows in Africa, and how can trade unions advocate for policies that promote fiscal transparency and accountability?
2. How can trade unions leverage their influence to address the mounting sovereign debt crisis and protect social protection financing for vulnerable populations?
3. What role can trade unions play in mobilizing resources and fostering collaborations to ensure sustainable financing for comprehensive social protection measures?

##### ***Commission 3: Advancing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agenda to Develop an African Value Chain for Industrialization***

1. How can trade unions actively contribute to AfCFTA's goals of developing the African value chain and supporting local industries for sustainable industrialization?

2. What specific policies and initiatives should trade unions advocate for within AfCFTA to ensure job creation, skills development, and inclusivity?
3. What strategies can trade unions employ to address potential challenges or disparities that may arise within the AfCFTA framework?

***Commission 4: Advancing the African Trade Union Just Transition Campaign Towards Sustainable and Decent Jobs***

1. How can trade unions effectively advocate for a shift to renewable energy while safeguarding workers' rights and promoting job creation in green sectors?
2. What measures can trade unions propose to ensure a just transition that minimizes job displacement and upholds social justice during the shift to sustainable employment?
3. In what ways can trade unions collaborate with governments and industries to facilitate a smooth transition to sustainable and decent jobs?

***Commission 5: Addressing Peace and Security Challenges and the State of Democracy and Human Rights in Africa today***

1. What roles can trade unions play in promoting peace, stability, and good governance in Africa, particularly concerning labour rights and human rights protection in the recent West African countries where coup d'états have become rampant?
2. How can trade unions address socio-political challenges to ensure workers' rights, democracy, and human rights are safeguarded across the continent?
3. What strategies can trade unions adopt to engage with governments and civil society in advocating for policies that foster democracy, human rights, and social justice?

## **5 Expected Outputs and Outcomes**

### **5.1 Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the program, participants will:

- Participants will acquire skills to foster unity among trade unions, emphasizing the importance of organizational strength and collaborative action.
- Attendees will gain insights into the complexities of illicit financial flows and burgeoning sovereign debt in Africa.
- Participants will explore strategies to maximize the potential of AfCFTA. They will learn to advocate for policies that support the African value chain, empower local industries, and promote job creation within the framework of AfCFTA.
- Participants will delve into discussions about achieving universal social protection.
- Attendees will enhance their leadership skills in critical areas such as addressing sovereign debt crises, managing social protection financing, unifying trade unions, leveraging AfCFTA for industrialization, and advancing the African Trade Union campaign.

### **5.2 Program Outcome**

- A detailed report, including sections on key messages and recommendations;
- Build the capacity of the participants in leading trade unions for better influence, impact and change;

- Suggest topic issues for the new 4-year new Strategic plan further elaborated from recommendations from the Commissions, panel discussions and open discussions; and
- Networking to improve and share experiences.

## **6 Format /Methodology**

The program will be organised over 4 days and shall include several thematic sessions and working groups. The methodology shall consist of a mixture of lectures, plenaries, panel discussions and thematic working groups or commissions.

The commissions shall run for at least one and half days to deliberate and present their reports containing actionable points to plenary on the last day. Additionally, there will be a rally held in the city of Lusaka to protest Africa's burgeoning debt situation. The rally comes at the back of the Africa Sovereign Debt Campaign launched at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress in Nairobi, Kenya.

## **7 Participants**

The 14<sup>th</sup> Edition of the New Year School shall bring together about 100 participants mainly the new leadership of ITUC-Africa and various committee members elected at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress held in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2023.

This list of participants shall include the following :

- Trade union leaders (national, sub-regional and continental)
- ITUC-Africa General Council Members
- ALREI Governing Board
- Members of the Governing Body of the ILO
- Women in trade union leadership structures
- Youth in trade union leadership structures
- Labour researchers and educators
- Global Union Federations (GUFs)
- ILO and Solidarity Support Organisations representatives
- ITUC-Africa Staff

## **8 Languages**

English, French and Portuguese will be the working languages with simultaneous interpretation provided.

## **9 Organizer**

Africa Labour Research and Education Institute (ALREI) of ITUC-Africa.