

# TRADE UNIONS' INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO SUPPORT THE SDGs AND THE DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS AGENDA



The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are central in the trade union agenda because they are rights-based, universally relevant and they are featured on the three interrelated economic, social and environmental dimensions.

The trade union movement calls for a *New Social Contract*<sup>1</sup> for governments, business and workers, with a Labour Protection Floor for all workers. This means that rights are respected, jobs are decent with minimum living wages and collective bargaining, workers have some control over working time, social protection coverage is universal, due diligence and accountability must drive business operations, and social dialogue ensures just transition measures for climate and technology.

The SDGs represent a key avenue to foster a new developmental model demanded by trade unions worldwide. Development cooperation – guided by the development effectiveness agenda – is critical to support change along this path.

Trade unions are strongly involved in development cooperation through programmes that cover crucial areas to achieve the SDGs, such as labour rights, occupational health and safety rights, social protection, gender equality, organising workers, enhancing social dialogue processes and industrial relations.

Trade unions are development actors in their own right. Through their international cooperation initiatives, they contribute to multiple goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, such as labour rights, social protection, gender equality, climate justice, business accountability, social dialogue and industrial relations. The development effectiveness principles (ownership, focus on results, inclusive development partnerships, and transparency and accountability) are intrinsic to building a workers' movement that acts at local, sectoral, national and global levels.

This brief provides examples of how trade union programmes contribute to the SDGs and link to the development effectiveness principles.<sup>2</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS PRINCIPLES



### FOCUS ON RESULTS

Workers' rights implementation is at the very heart of long-term and sustainable growth paths, thus aligning with the Focus on Results referring to "lasting impact on eradicating poverty and reducing inequality".



### INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Supporting social dialogue processes fully aligns with Inclusive Development Partnerships, as well as with Transparency and Accountability, in "recognising the different and complementary role of all the actors" and in particular to social partners.



### TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Mutual accountability amongst citizens, organisations and stakeholders, is critical to delivering results. Trade unions enhance transparent and accountable practices.



### DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP

Contributing to putting in place or improving just transition policies to strengthen the principle ownership of development priorities by developing countries.

## IMPROVED WORKING CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN



INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS



FOCUS ON RESULTS

Trade unions engage in social dialogue and collective bargaining at company, sectoral and national level. Sectoral social dialogue makes it possible for workers' and employers' organisations to reach agreements that contribute to respect for labour rights while increasing competitiveness. Trade union projects supporting social dialogue at sectoral level contribute to inclusiveness and reduce the likelihood of a downward spiral in labour and environmental conditions.<sup>3</sup>

The South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) is a trade union representing more than 250,000 members, of which 45% are female working in the wholesale and retail sector. Supported by the Belgian General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions (ACLVB-CGSLB), SACCAWU has engaged in sectoral collective bargaining with major supermarkets and other retailing companies where women represent the great majority of workers.<sup>4</sup> These collective bargaining processes have led to major achievements as 15 of the 29 large companies (accounting for more than 300,000 employees) have accepted to establish a new sectoral minimum wage (+7.3% between 2016 and 2017), increase unemployment benefits from 8 to 12 months and increase the maternity leave benefit from 54% to 66% of the wage.

These initiatives contribute to protect labour rights (SDG 8) and promote social protection, including wages (SDG 10), while tackling issues related to gender equality (SDG 5).



## BUSINESS ACCOUNTABILITY IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS



INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS



TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The increasing global economy demands that trade unions adapt their strategies towards global supply chains to improve working conditions in various sectors. Such strategies involve companies, governments and civil society.

The Strategic Partnership for Garment Supply Chain Transformation is an innovative programme designed to improve labour conditions in the garment industry. This partnership brings together the expertise of trade unions,<sup>5</sup> NGOs, governments and the Fair Wear Foundation (which represents progressive brands and factories) to ensure that all supply-chain actors engage in improving and guaranteeing decent working conditions. In West-Java (Indonesia), this partnership has contributed to develop Multicompany Collective Bargaining Agreements (including health and safety, working hours, and compliance with wage agreements) that apply to several companies of the same sector within the same region. The big advantage is to upscale both labour and productivity improvements through constructive social dialogue.

This program contributes directly to both SDG 8 and 12. Moreover, thanks to its multistakeholder approach, it shows how trade unions engage effectively in partnerships at global level that promote sustainable development (SDGs 17).<sup>6</sup>



# ORGANISING WORKERS FOR TRANSITIONS TO FORMAL ECONOMIES



FOCUS ON RESULTS



INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS



DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP

More than 60% of the world's workers (representing about two billion people) make their living in the informal economy and are deprived of decent working conditions.<sup>7</sup> In Africa, Latin America and Asia, trade unions have been working for decades on organising informal workers, defending their rights and ensuring their access to social protection schemes. Such actions are contributing to fighting poverty and to formalising the informal economy using the ILO Recommendation 204 on the transition from the informal to the formal economy as a reference.

Under *coordination of the Confédération Syndicale du Burundi (COSYBU)*,<sup>8</sup> trade unions in Burundi have been advocating for years the inclusion of informal workers in national and regional social dialogue. In 2011, these advocacy efforts led to the signature of the National Tripartite Charter on Social Dialogue, which includes both informal and formal activities.<sup>9</sup> Since 2016, COSYBU has also been advocating including in the new labour code a classification that would open the opportunity to have specific laws on the informal economy and hence more leverage to improve working conditions and workers' rights for informal workers.

For many years, the Belgian Christian Trade Unions (ACV-CSC) have been supporting domestic workers' movements and trade unions like the Indian National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM) and the National Domestic Workers Federation (NDWF). Both have achieved major results. At global level, they engaged for the adoption of an ILO Convention for the protection of domestic workers (Convention 189, adopted in 2011).

At national level, the NDWTU contributed to extending the application of The Minimum Wage Act of 1948 to the States of Assam (2012), Meghalaya (2014), Haryana (2015), Tripura (2016) and Dadra and Nagar Haveli (2016). Through this action, the NDWF has managed to secure the right to minimum wages for one sixth of all female domestic workers in India.

Such efforts reduce inequalities within a society and contribute to SDG 10 and to target 1.3 of SDG 1 on fighting poverty through the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all.

Since 2008, India has had special legislation on social security for informal workers, but it is poorly implemented. Mondiaal FNV (the Dutch trade unions' international solidarity organisation) supports the National Alliance for Social Security, which includes six Indian trade unions, and coordinates advocacy work and campaigns to enhance the implementation of the law, particularly for pension schemes. Their actions have led to improvements in the scheme in several states. In Andhra Pradesh State, informal workers are now also represented on the Welfare Board, and social security structures have been developed in Bihar and Gujarat.<sup>10</sup>

60% of world's workers are in the informal economy



ILO Rec. 204





## CONTRIBUTING TO CLIMATE JUSTICE AND JUST TRANSITION



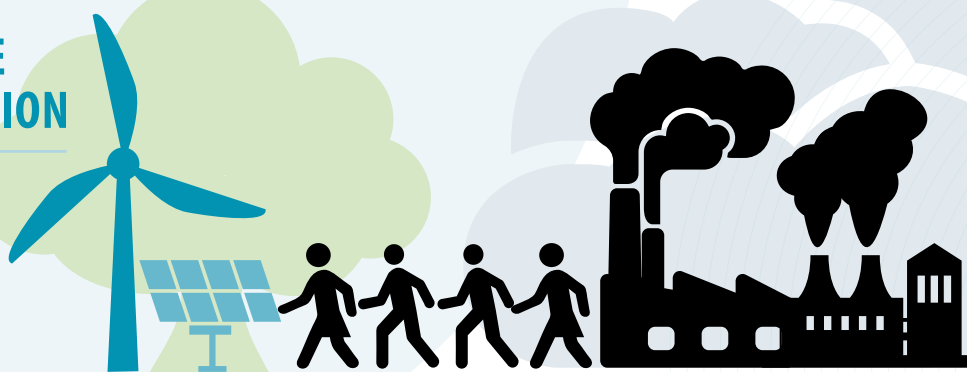
DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP

“Just Transition” refers both to measures to reduce the impact of job and livelihood losses and industry phase-out on workers and communities, and to measures to produce new low-emission decent jobs and livelihoods and healthy communities. Therefore, Just Transition means anticipating consequences of industry change and maximising the opportunities for socio-economic transformation. This is why social dialogue, which implies the involvement of the social partners in the decision-making processes with governments, is a crucial aspect of Just Transition.

The project “Climate change: building trade union capacities and quality public services for a just transition (2018-2022)”,<sup>11</sup> is an example of how trade unions can engage national governments on Just Transition.

This project aims to build capacity for public services trade unions to address the climate crisis. The partners hope to improve the technical and organisational skills of public services unions in order to develop effective social dialogue, identify the key aspects of the implementation of national commitments, and provide analytical tools for the critical evaluation of measures to be taken. The ultimate goal is to promote a socially just and green transition to address the climate crisis, demand government policies on the climate crisis, which see state intervention as central to reducing poverty (SDG 1), fostering decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), and climate action (SDG 13).

This project is being developed by Public Services International (PSI)<sup>12</sup> and supported by Union to Union<sup>13</sup> through the Swedish trade unions Akademikerförbundet SSR, Vision and Kommunal in Zambia, Tunisia, Kenya, Peru, Jamaica, Dominica, and Antigua and Barbuda.<sup>14</sup>



## CONTRIBUTING TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT



INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS



TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Local development is key to tackle job creation, economic development, social issues and environmental concerns. The Involvement of trade unions at local level offers the opportunity to create synergies and collaboration with governments and other civil society organisations. Moreover, trade unions’ development cooperation fosters transparency and mutual accountability as the relationships between partners go beyond the framework of international cooperation.

Since 2012, Dominican trade unions (CASC, CNUS and CNTD) have implemented various projects (“Participa Higüey” and “Más Sindicato”) with the leadership of the Italian and Spanish trade unions’ support solidarity organisations ISCOS<sup>15</sup> and ISCOD.<sup>16</sup> Through these projects, the Dominican unions have been able to share their expertise on social dialogue and decent work. They have contributed to strengthening the capacities of civil society leaders and to tackling issues head-on, e.g., social security rights for formal and informal workers. This work has benefitted more than 6,000 people – from mainly young people, women and migrants to municipality staff and elected representatives. Dominican trade unions have also contributed to the recognition of more than 250 civil society organisations in a participatory forum for the formulation of local development policies to generate decent employment and eradicate poverty. The project “Más Sindicato” strengthens trade unions in the organisation and representation of the self-employed as well as the employability and self-employment levels of the municipalities of Higüey and Baní, paying particular attention to the inclusion of young people and women.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The interests of workers from the Global North and the Global South are inextricably linked and translate into a common will to build fairer societies for all. Trade unions' development cooperation initiatives have a specific added value, since they contribute to the SDGs through the development effectiveness principles, especially around the promotion of the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda: employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. This is reflected in trade unions' global call for a New Social Contract between governments, business and workers, with a Labour Protection Floor that will ensure fundamental

workers' rights, an adequate living wage, safe and healthy workplaces, and limits on hours of work. Trade unions develop their actions by engaging with different actors (mainly governments and employers) and are subject to the influence of a multitude of factors relating to the social and political environment in which they act. Sustainable outcomes are therefore always the result of processes made up of a variety of strategies developed and adapted over time. Hence, trade unions engage in long-term partnerships that support long-term processes, with a strong focus on capacity building and organising workers, to achieve effective and sustainable results.

## TO SUPPORT TRADE UNIONS' INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY INITIATIVES, DEVELOPMENT ACTORS SHOULD:

### STRENGTHEN

their support to trade unions' contribution to the achievement of the SDGs.

### PUSH

for social dialogue as a means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda that will put to action the development effectiveness principles.

### SUPPORT

trade unions' organisational capacity worldwide and their ability to engage in social dialogue at global, national and sectoral levels.

### PROMOTE

an enabling environment, based on the respect of freedom of association and collective bargaining rights and the right to organise, for trade unions to contribute to sustainable development.

All footnotes available on the online version of this document:  
<https://www.ituc-csi.org/international-cooperation-for-sdg>



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[dce@ituc-csi.org](mailto:dce@ituc-csi.org) | [www.ituc-csi.org/development-cooperation](http://www.ituc-csi.org/development-cooperation)  
 Twitter: @TUDCN\_RSCD | Facebook: @TUDCN.RSCD

- <sup>1</sup> ITUC, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress Statement, December 2018, available at <https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc-congress2018-en.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> This policy brief is based on a literature review and on data collection through a short survey among trade union solidarity support organisations conducted between January and March 2019.
- <sup>3</sup> ITUC-ILO, 2017, Social Dialogue as a Driver and Governance Instrument for Sustainable Development, Brussels-Geneva
- <sup>4</sup> Huyse et al. (2014), Evaluation of the BIS-MSI vzw programme 2012-2014: Synthesis report, HIVA Leuven; CGSLB Monitoring report (2018)
- <sup>5</sup> Including the Dutch Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond - CNV and Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging - FNV trade unions
- <sup>6</sup> [Strategic Partnership for Garment Supply Chain Transformation 2016-2020](#) (consulted on 20/03/2019)
- <sup>7</sup> ILO (2018), Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture (third edition) / International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2018
- <sup>8</sup> COSYBU is supported by the Belgian Liberal (ACLVB-CGSLB).
- <sup>9</sup> ITUC (2018), The contribution of social dialogue to the 2030 Agenda Formalising the informal economy, ITUC, Brussels, p.20
- <sup>10</sup> Mondiaal FNV (2018), Social Dialogue: The Basis For Sustainable Development, FNV Mondiaal.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.world-psi.org/en/climate-change-building-trade-union-capacities-and-quality-public-services-just-transition-jamaica>
- <sup>12</sup> PSI is the Global Federation of Public Service Workers.
- <sup>13</sup> Union to Union is the international solidarity organisation of the Swedish trade unions.
- <sup>14</sup> These two countries are part of what are referred to as Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which have been recognised as a distinct group of developing countries since the United Nations 1992 Earth Summit. SIDS are extremely vulnerable to challenges ranging from debt and unemployment to climate change and the rising sea level.
- <sup>15</sup> ISCOS is the trade union solidarity support organisation of the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL).
- <sup>16</sup> ISCOD is the trade union solidarity support organisation of the Spanish Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT).