



NAMIBIA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2021

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED SDG-DRIVEN RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the government of the Republic of Namibia introduced a number of stimulus and relief measures to directly support individuals, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and corporations, and safeguard jobs. Fiscal and monetary measures were undertaken in the form of loans or loan payment moratoriums, but trade unions note that these schemes mainly favoured big businesses, as smaller businesses were wary of requesting them to avoid further indebtedness.

Specific measures in the area of social protection included a once off emergency income grant of N\$750 to employees who lost their jobs during the pandemic in the formal and informal sectors. But this initiative has been characterised by bureaucratic ways of handling.

Employment retention measures were undertaken through the flexibilisation of labour regulations, oriented to avoid major retrenchments and closures of businesses. But trade unions note that these have not yielded the expected results, as many people have lost their jobs and salaries, and hours of work were cut unilaterally, and workers were forced to go on unpaid leave. Unions call for ensuring wage and income protection for workers, a further strengthening of the social protection system and guaranteeing effective access to unemployment and pension benefits.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The government adopted its current National Development Plan (NDP 5) straight after the adoption of the SDGs in 2015. As a result, the NDP is not aligned with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, and any overlaps with the SDGs are coincidental. Trade unions suggest that this has led to many critical SDGs receiving little or no attention, notably SDG 8, as it was also reflected in Namibia's 2018 Voluntary National Review.

National development and the implementation of the SDGs are overseen by the National Planning Commission in the office of the president.

Trade unions report that there is no transparent monitoring or evaluation of the implementation of the SDGs in Namibia, nor are any updates provided to the public or trade unions. Consultations were organised in the context of drafting the NDPs. However, the stakeholders that were invited were narrowly defined and mainly included entities that are close to the government. Neither independent trade

unions nor employers' organisations were invited to take part and were thus unable to provide input to the plans. Trade unions report that their priorities have not been taken into account in the implementation of the SDGs due to a lack of political will at the highest levels in Namibia; there is also a lack of understanding of the contributions trade unions can make, as the government failed to provide a platform for them to contribute. This lack of interest from the government is also evident in the fact that there is no discussion on the SDGs, including SDG 8, in social dialogue settings. However, after a long insistence, trade unions were invited to participate in a VNR validation workshop.

Trade unions report that no specific resources have been allocated to the SDGs aside from those allocated towards the NDP, which fail to serve their purpose due to corruption and other forms of mismanagement. This lack of resources has meant that no meaningful implementation has taken place.

TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Information sessions but no interaction

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners not involved in defining and realising government's SDG national plan



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

In 2019, 13.2 per cent of the population of Namibia was living below the income poverty line; the level of multidimensional poverty, which includes individuals above the income poverty line but still suffering deprivation in health, education and/or standard of living, was 24.6 per cent points higher. In 2019, 9.4 per cent of workers were living under the poverty line, an increase from 7.7 per cent in 2015. This indicates regression in meeting **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty for all people)**. On **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)**, 27.2 per cent of the population has access to either direct or indirect social protection benefits. However, the centralisation of services makes it difficult for the rural and poorest sectors of the population to access these.

There is a need for further efforts to achieve progress on **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**, as the GNI per capita is N\$8,917 for women against N\$10,497 for men, suggesting that women are less employed and/or perform more unpaid domestic work. With regard to **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life)**, 43 per cent of Namibia's parliamentarians are women and the representation of women in senior and middle managerial positions stands at 48.2 per cent. However, in the period 2015-2019, only 40.6 per cent of women had attended secondary education (as compared to 42 per cent of men).

There are serious concerns about Namibia meeting the targets set by **SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all)**. The proportion of informal employment outside of agriculture stood at 47 per cent in 2018, with more women (50.4 per cent) than men (43.4 per cent) being informally employed. Women are also far more likely (70 per cent) to be self-employed than men (31 per cent). This suggests further efforts are needed to meet **target 8.3 (support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of MSMEs)**. There has been a regression on **target 8.5 (full and productive employment**

and decent work for all), as 2019 figures show that 75.2 per cent of Namibian employees earned N\$1,353 (US\$91) or less per month, a deterioration from 2018 figures. In 2018, the broad unemployment rate of the economically active population stood at 33.4 per cent (32.5 per cent for men and 34.3 per cent for women). NEET indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at 31.8 per cent of youth aged 15-24 in 2018, with young women being more affected (34.2 per cent) than men (29.3 per cent). Indicators for **target 8.7 (eradicate forced labour and the worst forms of child labour)** are worrying, as in 2019 it was estimated that 8,000 people were living in modern slavery. **Target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** is far from being met, as in 2016 there were only 61 trained labour inspectors for a working population of nearly 680,000 in the country. To meet **target 8.b (develop and operationalise a global strategy for youth employment)**, the government has put in place several initiatives to create employment. However, their implementation is hampered by lack of buy-in from relevant ministries and government departments.

Progress remains to be made for Namibia to reach **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality)**, as in 2015, the top 10 per cent of income earners had a 47.3 per cent share of GDP, with the bottom 20 per cent of income earners holding a paltry 2.8 per cent share. With regard to **target 10.7 (facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people)**, Namibia adopted a National Labour Migration Policy in 2020. However, while there is formally no discrimination on the freedom of association for migrant workers, this is limited by short or fixed-term employment contracts and employers' control of work permits.

While the government of Namibia has introduced some policies to meet **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**, trade unions report that these have not been adequately implemented.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To ensure an SDG-led recovery and resilience from the crisis, trade unions are urging the government to:

- Strengthen and extend social protection and ensure universal access to health care.
- Put in place effective measures to absorb shocks to the economy.
- Adopt policies for a wage-led growth, making wages commensurable to living conditions to increase demand.
- Adopt monetary policies that encourage employment creation, reducing the interest rate for loans in proportion to the number of jobs created.
- Create a sovereign wealth fund to direct dividends from the national resources to fund social protection programmes and employment creation schemes.
- Prioritise social dialogue for the elaboration of recovery measures and the implementation of the SDGs.
- Establish a national tripartite dialogue on the SDGs, together with a co-ordinating task force.
- Set up a focal point in each ministry that would be responsible for mainstreaming, monitoring and reporting on the progress or challenges in the implementation of the relevant SDGs and targets.
- Set up a reporting mechanism on the SDGs, with quarterly reporting sessions, open for participation to trade unions.



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