Interim Report on
A MAJOR INITIATIVE BY AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS IN RESPONSE TO
ARMED CONFLICTS:
A technical assistance planning seminar to build capacity of Organization of
African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and its affiliates for effective response to
Africa’s armed conflicts,
held in Accra, Ghana, October 20 – 24, 2003.

With the alarming number of armed conflicts faced by Africa and the devastating
impact not only on the trade unions and their means of livelihoods but also on every
other aspect of societal life, the Organization of African Trade Union Unity
(OATUU) and its affiliates sought IFP/CRISIS’ assistance towards building their
capacity to contribute to conflict early warning, prevention, resolution and post-
conflict reintegration, reconstruction and peace consolidation. To plan effectively to
respond to this request, OATUU and IFP/CRISIS (together with the financial
contribution of ACTRAV and the Regional Department for Africa) brought together
senior trade union representatives from 13 conflict-affected African countries
(Angola, Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Liberia,
Senegal, Sierra Leone, Chad, Rwanda, Uganda as well as Ghana which is currently
hosting many refugees from neighbouring countries) to generate the precise elements
that needed to be reflected in such a conflict response capacity building technical
assistance programme.

Through the seminar, the trade unionists and OATUU were able to identify and
exchange:
- experiences and information on the causes – “structural” and “triggers” of
  armed conflicts in their countries and the region as a whole;
- the conflicts’ impacts on the population, institutions including the trade
  unions, peace and stability;
the role of the trade unions in early warning, conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and peace building;
the trade unions’ current strengths and weaknesses for the above roles and how to address the latter.

A number of pertinent ideas which emanated from the meeting together with the strategies to be adopted are highlighted below in the conclusions and recommendations of the seminar.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble
The problem of armed conflicts in Africa engaged the attention of all the participants as they recognised the important role trade unions can play at the different levels in conflict situations i.e. early warning, prevention, resolution and post conflict reconstruction. To this end participants appreciated very much the initiative of OATUU and ILO in organising this seminar. But for trade unions and their members to play their roles effectively, they need to be very well informed, educated and trained in all the processes of conflict situations.

For the trades unions and their members to be fully educated and trained in these processes, they need material, financial and technical resources in order to adequately empower the members for effective involvement in conflict situations. They therefore request for a technical assistance programme for OATUU and its affiliates to build the capacities of the unions to play a more effective role at all levels of conflict situations.

3.1 PREREQUISITES
However, they identified a number of important prerequisites for the trade unions to play this role. They must;
- Represent the bulk of workers in the formal and informal sectors
- Be independent, non-partisan and dynamic
- Have adequate structures and essential resources – financial, material and human
- Be transparent
- Ensure accountability
- Be democratic and ensure good governance within their structures
Develop strategic alliances and good networking with Civil Society Organisations and other stakeholders

Be united and must have moral authority

Be knowledgeable and cultured

Develop a culture of listening to other opinions

Have interventions and plan of actions

The participants agreed on the following elements of the programme:

3.2 THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN EARLY WARNING AND PREVENTION

Trade unions should

- Use neutral position to broker peace between/among the conflicting parties
- Network with other Civil Society Organisations and stakeholders to put pressure on the parties in the conflict
- Use their strength to mobilise against the conflicting parties where necessary
- Guarantee the respect for human rights
- Observe and analyse the causes of conflicts and monitor the trends in these areas
- Defend, protect and promote trade union and other human rights and sanction the violation of any of these rights
- Put in place a structure for observation and regulation of conflicts
- Organise civic education for the population
- Fight against corruption, injustice, exclusion, intolerance, bad governance and unemployment

The strategies for execution

- Establish trade union unity and or unity of action
- Establish strategic alliances for the mobilisation of national and international opinion
- Put in place sub-regional and regional networks for the exchange of information and experience
- Provide material and logistic support for the national and international partners
Identify the problems and their root causes to facilitate proper analysis of the conflict situation

Use newsletters, radio and other modern telecommunications to disseminate information on conflicts.

Strengthen trade union capacity in the resolution of conflicts

Educate and train members on conflicts

Inform and sensitise their members and the general public on conflicts

Identify and establish focal points on conflicts in the various organisations

Appoint expert to assist the focal points on conflicts

Build alliances with Civil Society Organisations and other stakeholders

Provide effective leadership

Establish well resourced research units for the various trade unions

Develop a training module on conflict resolution

3.3 THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN POST CONFLICT REINTEGRATION

Trade unions must:

Be actively involved and participate in all the planning, execution and monitoring of the reintegration, reconstruction and peace consolidation programmes and be beneficiaries of the resources of the programmes

Demand compensation for war victims

Stress the importance of employment for people affected by the conflict to contribute to the reconstruction as well as a means for consolidating peace

Push for employment intensive reintegration and reconstruction programmes in order to absorb many of the affected people and also to reduce poverty

Monitor the peace impacts of these programmes

Ensure gender equity, equal treatment and inclusion of the diverse groups in all the reintegration, reconstruction and peace consolidation programmes

Stress the importance of reintegration for all who are victims of conflicts

Sensitise and encourage all displaced people to go back to their places of origin
- Embark on trauma counselling to assist in the psychological healing of the affected people.
- Ensure that the reintegration, reconstruction and peace consolidation processes do not re-establish /reintroduce the conditions prevailing before the conflicts began, but rather provide a window of opportunity for positive change
- Develop a culture of citizenship and patriotism especially when the conflicts are ethnic/tribal in origin

3.4 WHAT DO TRADE UNIONS NEED TO PLAY THIS ROLE

Trade unions must:
- Have human, financial and material resources to implement their programmes
- Have close working relationships with Ministries and other national, international and non-governmental institutions established for the purpose of reconstruction and peace consolidation
- Be educated on skills of reintegration, reconstruction and peace consolidation processes
- Participate in bodies set up for the purpose of promoting reconciliation and peace
- Have national, sub-regional, regional and international solidarity
- Have support from international institutions in the implementation of their programmes

3.5 TRADE UNION SUB-REGIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

These bodies should
- Develop information networks and centres at sub-regional, regional and international levels
- Provide expertise
- Strengthen social dialogue
- Establish early-warning networks
- Establish an African observatory commission in charge of conflict prevention
Establish relationship with governments and governmental structures on conflicts at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels

- Strengthen trade unions structures
- Establish efficient communication networks
- Monitor the impact of intra-state and inter-state conflicts e.g. refugees, flow of arms
- Be vigilant on how their trade union colleagues are being treated/affected in the conflict situations
- Mobilise support at the various levels for the affected members/organisations
- Make correct analysis of the particular conflict
- Embark on advocacy to draw international attention to these conflicts and their effects in order to attract international assistance
- Exert pressure on governments to resolve the conflict and assist those affected
- Contribute to conflict resolution initiatives of the political-economic sub-regional and regional organisations
- Highlight critical issues which are not normally dealt with in conflict resolution e.g. employment creation, equity, respect for trade union and other human rights.

Co-ordination of efforts at different levels

- Involve the sub-regional organisations in education and training
- Ensure the coordination of focal points/follow-up Committees
- Establish follow up committees on conflicts at the various levels

Considering the urgency of the problem of armed conflicts with the attendant consequences, the participants called on OATUU and ILO to speed up the process of completing the formulation of the programme and the mobilisation of resources for its implementation.

The evaluation at the end of the seminar generated very positive feedback. Participants emphasized the following:
- that they had “learnt a lot” from the exercise, such as on the different factors - social, economic and not only political - that contributed to armed conflicts;
- they had upgraded their crisis response skills; experience and exposure.
- they expressed considerable appreciation of OATUU and ILO’s initiative in organizing the seminar;
- the seminar provided clear specification of the roles trade unions can play and the need for them to act in strategic alliance with other civil society groups;
- they described the methodology adopted – presentations on key topics by resource persons, plenary and group discussions, reports by participants on their country situation and experiences, comments from others and the IFP/CRISIS video on crisis response - as excellent;
- they urged the ILO and OATUU to mobilize quickly the necessary resources to ensure speedy follow up to the meeting’s conclusions and recommendations. I also urged them to attempt to follow them up through mainstreaming some of them in their ongoing and future activities. The participants themselves saw the need to have a focal person in each of their unions and in the union structures at the different levels;
- they also called for follow up country seminars;
- finally they urged IFP/CRISIS to translate its materials into French to facilitate their usage as they found them to be vital for their work.

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