

OVERVIEW OF LABOUR MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA, NAMIBIA AND ZIMBABWE: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND CHALLENGES

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This paper is concerned with issues affecting the existence and role of some of Southern African labour movements and trade unions in the globalised economy. Emphasis is placed on Zimbabwe with experiences drawn mostly from Namibia and South Africa because of the almost similar historical developments of the labour movements and trade unions in these countries. The paper explores the strengths, weaknesses, and threats, opportunities and challenges faced by trade unions and how they are reacting to these issues. An examination is made of how trade unions can be competitive and continue to be relevant as they face some of the negative effects of globalization like retrenchments, increased casualisation of labour, increased atypical workers, increased migrant labour and threats of freedom of association and collective bargaining which have resulted in among others, decline of membership.

An analysis is made of the gains and losses made by trade unions since the attainment of political independence due to globalization and failed economic policies like the Economic Reform Programmes pursued by governments like Zimbabwe. Highlights are made of the broader role assumed by some labour movements as they move away from confining themselves to purely matters of industrial relations becoming part of the broader civic society where they participate in issues of democracy and good governance. The question posed, here is whether or not such thrust compromises the autonomy of trade unions and can they remain sustainable in their core and traditional business of promoting and improving the working and living conditions of workers. The unique situation of the effects of the agrarian reform programme on trade unions in Zimbabwe and the role played by the unions is also brought to light.

The author highlights the challenges brought about by the HIV/AIDS pandemic on employment relations in particular raising issues of unfair discrimination and stigmatization of employees and how trade unions are reacting to the problem. Issues of mainstreaming of gender equality and equity in labour movements, trade unions and in industrial relations are also covered.

The paper is concluded by offering some of the possible solutions, alternatives and strategies like effective participation of trade unions in social dialogue so as to influence policies, adaptations to information communication technology, creation of linkages with the informal sector, increased regional and international collaboration and continuous relevant capacity building training programmes.

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