

SYMPOSIUM DESCRIPTION

Title	Africa Regional Symposium on Workers' Education
Inclusive Dates:	23-25 August 2023, Three days, 2-hour webinar sessions/day
Modality:	Online

A. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Background

At its 347th session held between 13 and 23 March 2023, the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization recommended the holding of the Global Workers' Symposium on "new Approaches to Workers' Education for Trade Union Revitalization." Under the coordination of the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), the biennial meeting brings together senior trade union leaders, academia and activists. The Global Workers' Symposium will take place in a virtual format, over a three-day period (18-20 September 2023).

The expected outcome of the global symposium is to enhance workers' solidarity, as an anvil of social change, through the exploration of new and effective ways of addressing the critical challenge of funding workers' education programmes. Some of the thematic issues for discussion will include collaboration, use of union facilities, investment in membership organizing and in-house union digital infrastructure, advocacy for the public financial support for workers' education programmes. The symposium will also address the measures for the standardization of workers' education curricula to meet the training needs of 21st century participants and to guarantee the effective management of labour education programmes.

In building up to the Global Workers' Symposium, ACTRAV-Turin will organise Regional Workers' Education Symposiums whose deliberations, submissions and outcomes will feed into the Global Workers' Symposium in September 2023. It is in this context that the African Regional Workers' Education Symposium will be organised from the 16th to the 18th of August 2023.

Workers' Education in Africa

In Africa, workers' education remains a critical tool for building worker consciousness, especially that the world of work has experienced a period of dramatic and multiple transformations in the form of changing labour markets, driven by technological advancement, climate change, globalization and demographic shifts.

Workers' education in Africa can be traced from the early formations of trade unions during the colonial times and after gaining political independence. Just like the setup of African trade unions that took place with the blessing and with open support of, mostly, the British and French colonial administration; workers' education also followed the format established by workers' organizations

from Europe. The main curriculum involved grass root education, freedom of association and collective negotiation.

The contemporary phase of worker education in Africa began during the 1990s with the end of colonialism in Africa and the intensified democratization process, debate on good governance and internal trade union democracy, economic reforms, globalization and emergence of new technologies, proliferation of the internet as well as emergence of social and health pandemics such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This period saw the content of education programmes expand to include gender mainstreaming, neo-liberalism (especially structural adjustment programmes), human and trade union rights and child labour as major priorities for the trade unions. The changing nature of work, especially the negative impacts of neo-liberal economic policies on African economies, massive job losses and growing informality, the failure of governance and absence of developmental states warranted that trade unions start to show more interest in political and economic issues.

In spite of the extra-ordinary challenges, workers' education remains the anvil upon which the trade union culture in Africa is created and adapted to changing needs. The region considers workers' education as a vehicle for building the capacity of trade unionists in order to enable them to cope with new challenges, have deeper insights into their trade unions and master the tools to change society through democratic participation. Education and training are important long-term responses to the challenges of globalisation and trade unions capacity building. It is through grassroots education and mobilisation of their members and community allies that unions have won victories on many challenging issues, including membership recruitment and organising.

Therefore, the Africa regional symposium on workers' education will provide an avenue for union leaders and activists to deliberately and continuously engage on newer ways of tackling new challenges of work conditions such as climate crisis, unemployment, informality, technological change and the rise of the internet, peace and resilience, and other emerging issues affecting the function of unions. The newly re-defined workers must also be included in labour education programmes. The deliberations and outcomes of the regional symposium will feed into the Global Workers' Education Symposium to be held from 18-20 September 2023.

B. OBJECTIVES OF THE SYMPOSIUM

The objectives of the symposium are to:

- i. Understand the current trends, key milestones, new approaches and future perspectives on workers' education in Africa;
- ii. Engage in strategic thinking and create a collection of good practices on trade unions' worker education for replication; and,
- iii. Develop measures for standardisation of workers' education curricula to meet the training needs of the 21st century participants

C. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

(What will the participants be able to do?)

By participants in the symposium will be able to:

- i. Implement new strategies and innovative pedagogies in workers' education;
- ii. Establish and implement monitoring mechanisms for workers' education;

- iii. Collaborate on workers' education with other trade unions; and,
- iv. Employ digital innovation and eLearning methodologies as part of trade union transformation.

D. STRUCTURE OF THE SYMPOSIUM

DAY 1. Evolution of Workers' Education in Africa

Deliberations will focus on understanding and learning the trends (historical and current), key milestones, new approaches, achievements and future perspectives on workers' education at both global and Africa level.

DAY 2: Workers' Education Adapting to Fundamental Changes in the World of Work

Day two will focus on the diverse transformations that have taken place in workers' education in Africa from both a regional and sub-regional level. The deliberations will focus on how trade union education programmes have built the capacity of workers to deal and cope with new challenges in the world of work. Detailed presentations will focus particularly on governance, pedagogies and sustainability of workers' education. Case studies will be explored on how trade unions in Africa and their support institutions have transformed in order to remain relevant to deal with merging challenges, with lessons drawn on how workers' education continues to be used as a vehicle for workers consciousness and capacity building during the dramatic transformations in the word of work.

DAY 3: The future of workers' education, digital innovations and trade union networks for strengthening workers' education and trade unions in transformation and Way forward

Day three will focus on the how trade unions can leverage on digital transformation to strengthen and sustain workers' education. Case studies on eLearning in East and Southern Africa will be shared. The role, relevance and sustainability of international trade union networks on labour education will also be deliberated on. Highlights of achievements at ACTRAV-Turin training activities will also be shared with a view of strengthening workers' education. A session will be dedicated to collate all the deliberations and debates generated during the three days that will be shared at the Global Workers Symposium in September 2023.

E. METHODOLOGIES

(How will learning and co-learning be undertaken?)

The three days will focus on presentations, case studies and plenary discussions to provide participants to learn relevant experiences, current practices and insights on workers' education.

The symposium will be implemented in **English, French and Portuguese** languages.

F. COUNTRIES COVERED AND TARGET PARTICIPANTS

(Who will benefit from the training?)

The symposium will be open to all trade unions in Africa, regional and sub-regional trade union bodies and, labour support organisations.