

# **Trade Unions and Workplace Democracy in Africa**

**Gérard Kester**

**with one chapter by Akua O. Britwum**

TRADE UNIONS AND WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY  
IN AFRICA

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GÉRARD KESTER

*formerly Institute of Social Studies, The Netherlands*

with one chapter by Akua O. Britwum

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# Notes on Authors

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# Preface and Acknowledgements

This book reports on questionnaire surveys, case studies and trend studies conducted over the past 20 years in Africa, under the African Workers' Participation Development Programme (APADEP). The International APADEP Secretariat, based at the Centre of Development Studies of the University of Cape Coast (Ghana), requested me to bring together the major results of the many publications and research reports in one comparative publication. Upon my retirement it looked like a logical thought on their part to burden me with a job that could be predicted to demand a lot of time – and that is what retired people are supposed to have. I accepted the invitation because the challenge of writing up the accumulated research results of APADEP research had to be taken up.

Let me hasten to say that this book is not the product of one individual – to the contrary. Many researchers have contributed to what may be called the heritage of APADEP research. They have published the results of the studies in their respective countries, and many of them have been kind enough to assist me when writing up this comprehensive work, and to allow me to refer extensively to their published and unpublished research records. In particular, I wish to thank Nazi Kaboré and Anaïs Dayamba in Burkina Faso, Deolinda Reis and Francisco Rodrigues in Cape Verde, Patrick Agbesinyale in Ghana, Mid Diallo, Maurice Dopavogui and Mamadou Baldé in Guinea, Massa Coulibaly and Tacko Oumou Maiga in Mali, Andrea Von Zelewski in South Africa, Samuel Chambua in Tanzania, and Freek Schiphorst in The Netherlands. Furthermore, I benefited from many constructive remarks by Kwasi Adu-Amankwah and Patrick Agbesinyale (Ghana), Darcy Dutoit, Kessie Moodley and Evance Kalula (South Africa), Henri Pinaud (France) and Corrie Roeper (The Netherlands). In particular, I was showered with useful comments, critical remarks and substantive proposals for change by Akua Britwum, who also accepted the task of writing the chapter on gender in this book. I thank all of them and do realise that the work presented in this book is more their work than it is mine. Yet, as author, I of course accept the responsibility for any weaknesses in this book. And as a retired person I feel obliged to my grandchildren who had wanted to see me more often. I dedicate this work to them, and through them to Africa's youth.

I also wish to thank the large APADEP network which includes a great number of trade unionists and academics in many African countries. In particular, I wish to thank the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), the Federation of Netherlands Trade Unions (FNV) and the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, all three of whom have, over many years, supported APADEP as a programme. The generous offer of FNV to sponsor the publication of this book should be seen as an unusual act of international solidarity. In this era of globalisation, workplace democracy is not written with grand letters. But as a trade union, FNV itself keeps fighting for more democracy at the workplace and wishes to support trade unions and workers elsewhere in the world who wish to do the same. That FNV goes the

extra mile to also support independent scientific research in this field in Africa is a remarkable demonstration of long-term vision.

Gérard Kester

August 2006

# List of Abbreviations

AALC	Afro-American Labor Centre
ADB	Agricultural Development Bank
ALRN	African Labour Research Network
ANC	African National Congress
APADEP	African Workers' Participation Development Programme
Brakina	Société des Brasseries du Burkina Faso [Burkina Faso Beer Breweries Company]
CBA	collective bargaining agreement
CCM	Chama Cha Mapinduzi (political party in Tanzania)
CCSL	Confederacao Caboverdiana dos Sindicatos Livros [Cape Verde Confederation of Free Trade Unions]
CFA	Communauté du Franc Africain [Interstate African Currency]
CGTB	Confédération Générale du Travail du Burkina Faso [Confederation of Burkina Faso Labour]
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNTB	Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs Burkinabé [National Confederation of Workers in Burkina Faso]
CNTG	Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée [National Confederation of Workers in Guinea]
CNTT	Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs du Togo [National Confederation of Workers in Togo]
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPP	Convention People's Party
CSB	Confédération Syndicale Burkinabé [Burkina Trade Union Confederation]
EMAB	Entreprise Malienne de Bois [Mali Wood Furniture Enterprise]
ENA	Ecole Nationale d'Administration [Mali National Institute of Public Administration]
ESOP	employee share ownership plan
EU	European Union
FEN	Fédération de l'Education Nationale [National Education Federation]
FFE	Fondation Friedrich Ebert [Friedrich Ebert Foundation]
FNV	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging [Netherlands Federation of Trade Unions]
FRELIMO	[Mozambique Liberation Front]
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	gross domestic product
GLSS	Ghana Living Standards Survey
GNAT	Ghana National Association of Teachers
GNP	gross national product

GOPDC	Ghana Oil Palm Development Company
GTUC	Ghana Trades Unions Congress
Guinea (1)	First APADEP questionnaire survey in Guinea (1986–90)
Guinea (2)	Second APADEP questionnaire survey in Guinea (2000–02)
HUICOMA	[oil pressing company in Mali]
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICPE	International Centre for Public Enterprises
IILS	International Institute of Labour Studies (ILO)
IIRA	International Industrial Relations Association
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRA	Industrial Relations Act
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
JUWATA	[National Federation of Tanzania Workers]
KPS	Kawasaki production system
MMD	Movement for Multi-Party Democracy
N	total number of respondents (in questionnaire surveys)
na	not available (of questionnaire data)
n.a.	not applicable (of questionnaire data)
NEC	National Employment Council
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NUTA	National Union of Tanganyika Workers
OATUU	Organisation of African Trade Union Unity
ONSL	Organisation Nationale des Syndicats Libres [National Organisation of Free Trade Unions]
ONSLG	Organisation Nationale des Syndicats Libres de Guinée [National Organisation of Free Trade Unions of Guinea]
ONSLM	Organisation Nationale des Syndicats Libres du Mali [National Organisation of Free Trade Unions in Mali]
OTTU	Organisation of Tanzania Trade Unions
PADEP	Programme Africain pour le Développement de la Participation des Travailleurs [French title for APADEP, see above]
PCC	President's Citizen College
PDG	Parti Démocratique de Guinée [Guinea Democratic Party]
Perfinc	Perfume Incorporated (perfume processing plant in Guinea)
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SACP	South African Communist Party
Samatex	Timber and plywood company in Samreboi (Ghana)
SAP	structural adjustment programme
SBK	Société des Bauxites de Kindia [Kindia Bauxite Company]
SGBG	Société Générale des Banques en Guinée [Guinea Banking Corporation]
SNEC	Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur [National Higher Education Trade Union]

SOBRAGUI	Société des Brasseries de Guinée [Guinea Beer Breweries Company]
SOFEDA	Société de Développement de Fer d’Afrique [African Iron and Steel Company]
SOGEL	Société Guinéenne d’Electricité [Electricity Company of Guinea]
SOGETRAC	Société Générale de Transport de Guinée [Public Bus Transport Company of Guinea]
SOMAPIL	Société Malienne des Piles Electriques [Mali Battery Production Company]
SYNTB	Syndicat National des Travailleurs de l’Education de Base [National Trade Union of Primary School Teachers]
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union
TFTU	Tanzania Federation of Trade Unions
TUC	Trade Unions Congress
TUCTA	Trade Unions Congress of Tanzania
UCC	University of Cape Coast (Ghana)
UDTG	Union Démocratique des Travailleurs de Guinée [Democratic Union of Guinea Workers]
UGTB	Union Générale des Travailleurs Burkinabé [General Union of Burkina Faso Workers]
UGTG	Union Générale des Travailleurs Guinéens [General Union of Guinea Workers]
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIP	United National Independence Party
UNSL/FO	Union Nationale des Syndicats Libres/Force Ouvrière [National Union of Free Trade Unions/The Workers’ Force]
UNTC-CS	Uniao Nacional dos Trabalhadores de Cabo Verde – Cental Sindical [National Union of Cape Verde Workers – Trade Union Centre]
UNTM	Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Mali [National Union of Mali Workers]
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USTB	Union Syndicale des Travailleurs du Burkina [United Trade Union of Burkina Faso Workers]
USTG	Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinée [United Trade Union of Guinea Workers]
WAMCO	West African Mills Company
WC	works council; workers’ council
WCDR	Workplace Committee for the Defence of the Revolution
WDC	Workers’ Defence Committee
WTO	World Trade Organisation
ZANU (PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People’s Union
ZCTU	Zambia Congress of Trade Unions
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions



*To  
Marijke, Maïté, Charlotte, Roya, Corentin  
and their mates,  
all grandchildren of Africa, carriers of a more democratic future.*

PART 1  
Introduction

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## Chapter 1

# Post-independence Labour Relations in Africa

This book is about democracy and explores how *workplace democracy* can broaden and deepen the democratisation process in Africa. It publishes the results of a longitudinal research project on the role of trade unions in the democratisation of workplace labour relations in Africa. The underlying assumption of the research is that democracy can only survive if it is participatory, that participatory democracy is a necessary condition for sustainable development, and that trade unions are ideally placed to contribute to the democratisation of the economy. This chapter will present a summary appreciation of Africa's post-independence developments depicting with broad brushes how labour relations took shape.<sup>1</sup> This *tour d'horizon* will serve to put the research project in perspective. At the end of the chapter the structure of the book will be outlined.

### **African Labour Relations: From Utopia to Exploitation**

#### *The post-independence honeymoon*

Upon achieving independence most governments saw it as their essential task to change the subsistence economy into a modern one. Looking at main development indicators (GNP, growth, productivity), the period 1960–70 was the one during which Africa got the best results compared to previous and later periods. For example, the growth rate was initially greater than population growth rate from 1961 to 1973.<sup>2</sup> GDP grew for the region, on average by 4.9 per cent between 1965 and 1970; and by 5.6 per cent between 1970 and 1975 (World Bank 1990). As a consequence of growth, achievements were made, especially in the industrial sector: the percentage of industrial production with regard to GDP rose between 1960 and 1980.<sup>3</sup> The economic achievements were due in part to a favourable international environment. Governments played a major role in economic activities mainly in the industrial sector and even sometimes in the commercial sector, creating many parastatal and

---

1 The author would like to thank Nadedjo Bigou Laré for his input to the labour economics summaries in this section.

2 The growth rate was almost equal to population growth in 1973–80, but dropped afterwards to become lower than population growth.

3 For instance, from 5 per cent to 13 per cent in Malawi; from 5 per cent to 9 per cent in Tanzania; from 4 per cent to 19 per cent in Zambia and from 17 per cent to 25 per cent in Zimbabwe (World Bank 1986).

state-owned companies, thus developing a large public sector in African countries. However, the state ownership model applied to the industrial sector provoked overstretching and under-capitalisation which in turn were to increase debt in the 1970s and the years that followed.

The initial economic growth led to a relative increase in salaries and employment. Employment grew because of a rapid expansion in opportunities that existed in both the formal and informal sectors (Vandemoortele 1991). Between 1960 and 1970–75, wages rose in real terms, especially within the formal sector. This could be explained by the impact of the emerging industrial sector and by the fairly low inflation rate (5.1 per cent annual average between 1965 and 1973) experienced by the countries just after independence (*ibid.*).

*Participation as development strategy* The attainment of political independence in Africa and other Third World countries created possibilities for fundamental changes in labour relations. Having shed colonial yokes, the new independent governments often proceeded to nationalise industries and services, and this also offered them the opportunity to give new shape and direction to labour relations. Many countries saw socialism as a more attractive political and development ideology than keeping to the capitalism of the West which had for many years enslaved them. Many post-colonial countries sided with the non-alignment movement, not wanting to join either the capitalist or the communist bloc, but paving an alternative ‘third way’. Yugoslavia was a leading protagonist of third way labour relations, as its workers’ self-management model with its spectacular effect on economic growth in the 1960s became a major source of inspiration for political leaders who were further inspired by African traditions of democracy and participation (the *palavre*). Participation was considered an alternative strategy for development, needed to establish a self-reliant economy and at the same time restructure the social and political order. The development of a new type of social relations in production was seen as of significance for the place of work but also beyond. Within the firm it could imply the democratisation of decision making in respect of issues such as earnings distribution, profit allocation, investment plans and the humanisation of work and of production relations. More in general, participation was expected to enhance education, social mobility, political consciousness and emancipation of workers and, in particular, women; in other words, deepen the overall process of democratisation.

Such alternative strategies were launched in several countries in Asia and Latin America (Kester 1992), and distinctly also in Africa. The ‘humanist philosophy’ of Zambia’s President Kaunda involved transition from a society in which capitalist enterprises were held in the hands of a few, towards another society characterised by human dignity and social justice, and the ultimate objective of workers managing enterprises themselves (Fincham and Zulu 1980). Similarly, human-centred development was key to the approach to development adopted in Tanzania; this involved the introduction of various forms of workers’ participation (Mihyo 1983; Chambua 1997). Self-management was official policy in Algeria in the first decade of its independence (Clegg 1971), and Egypt introduced major formal structures of workers’ participation at middle and supervisory management levels in public enterprises (El-Sayed 1978). In many African French-speaking countries ‘responsible

participation' became the key government slogan and trade unions gave the policy their support in many places, most prominently in Togo (Barnabo 1981; Laré 1997) and Senegal (Lô 1988), but also in many other countries (Kester and Sidibé 1997).

Charismatic leaders like Nasser, Nyerere and Kaunda played prominent roles in introducing policies on participation as part of broader overall strategies, often socialist in character, towards change and development. In Africa, as in other Third World countries, the perspective on participation or self-management was not one of changing internal enterprise procedures only: it also entailed the establishment of a structurally different labour relations pattern, including the framework of ownership. It is not surprising that the concern with ownership was more sharply felt in a number of developing countries than in Europe. State or public ownership was predominant (Blumberg 1968). The new government elites frequently had no power base in ownership, and many politicians and intellectuals believed that socialisation of ownership could and should be combined with redistribution of power, in a strategy in which participation and sometimes self-management were elements of a process of decolonisation and nationalisation, expansion of the public sector, ousting of foreign capital and so on. Transformation of ownership relations was accompanied by a new philosophy of social relations of production striking at the traditional domination of capital owners (state, private or any other) over workers.

#### *Economic decline and increase of state corporatism*

Some observers of the African economic scene referred to the period from 1975–76 into the 1980s as a 'lost decade for Africa' (Adebayo et al. 1991), and there are good reasons for doing so. There was a sharp drop in all economic indicators; unlike the other developing countries (for instance South-East Asia) development was marked by economic retrogression. Instead of industrial development, the modern sector 'collapsed' (Giri 1986). The majority of African population became impoverished: from 1980 to 1989, the average annual growth rate of the African GDP was 1.3 per cent, and in the same period the average production growth rate in the various sectors was minus 1.2 per cent for the industrial sector and only 1.3 per cent for agriculture (World Bank 1989; M'Baya 1994, 62). The debt to GDP ratio for Africa, which was 13.1 per cent in 1970, went up to 57.4 per cent in 1980 (Galarraga and Gogué 1997, 76). In the meantime, exports of agricultural products grew less than imports, making import substitution costly (Hugon 1993).

Consequently, degradations could be observed in the labour market: until the late 1970s the economic performances of new industries and modern services created employment. But as Vandemoortele stated, the employment crisis remained invisible because of the relatively rapid expansion of employment opportunities in both the modern and informal sectors. He estimated that the extent of open and disguised unemployment in Africa increased by 17 per cent between 1980 and 1988, which was four times faster than during the 1970s (Vandemoortele 1991, 84). On average, real wages declined by 25 per cent between 1980 and 1985 (Mihyo and Schiphorst 1995). In some countries like Ghana, Sierra Leone and Zambia, the decline was sharper. For the overall region, real wages were halved between 1970 and 1985 (Colclough 1991).

The persistence of these imbalances through the late 1970s and 1980s had major political consequences. From mobilising regimes requesting the participation of all economic partners to the development of the countries, most governments became authoritarian, plagued by their incapacity to overcome the economic crisis. Having come to power in the 1960s with democracy and social justice in mind, the argument gained ground that powerful governments were needed to assure durable and sustainable economic development. Such arguments were used by military officers in very many countries to justify coups d'état. The military regimes in turn failed to deliver, thus generating a spate of coups and countercoups. Democracy was suppressed in the military regimes but also in the one-party states where the single party became the only forum where development programmes were defined; all social groups were supposed to work within the guidelines defined by the party. Dictatorship became the last resort to suppress the general discontent among the people that was already boiling.

*State corporatism* Government intervention in labour relations became commonplace as governments took more leadership in both the political and economic spheres. Africa's labour relations have become characterised by high levels of state corporatism (Anstey 1997b). In the years immediately following independence (the honeymoon period) an 'historic collaboration' emerged between political and labour leaders in the pursuit of common objectives (Fashoyin 1992, 2). This political unionism has often been explained as an inevitable trade union mission under concrete historic conditions, where the trade union leaders believed their co-operation was ultimately in the workers' interest (see, for instance, the case of Mozambique in Hansen 1997, 301ff), or they were coerced into co-operation if they did not believe so. Shadur presents a painstaking overview of corporatism in Africa and concludes that it amounts to a concentration of interest representation into state-sanctioned groups which are expected to implement and enforce agreements through their membership although, he says, labour and capital could always to some degree influence state intervention (Shadur 1994, 20–21).<sup>4</sup> Trade unions were expected to play productionist roles: that is, stimulating productivity and at the same time moderating wage demands in the national interest (Fashoyin 1991, 118). It should be acknowledged that the situation differed from country to country, but the upshot was that there was no free interplay between the main actors in labour relations: management was incorporated into government hierarchy as the economy was state or public, and most of the trade unions were more or less integrated in a single political party which in turn controlled government.

Beginning with well-intended lofty ideals of co-operation of all to clear the development effort, those in power of the corporatist complex started to more and more confiscate all power and wealth, and the trade unions, who might have been willing to assume government-friendly roles in the beginning, became prisoners of

---

4 Also Henley observes that the state corporatist inclinations of the political elite, whether civilian or military, socialist or capitalist, were strong. However, they remained in conflict with the autonomous ambitions of trade unions as defenders of their memberships' sectional interests (Henley 1989, 290).

increasingly authoritarian regimes. 'Development corporatism' lost its legitimacy, and the running of the formal sector of the economy became a unilateral state affair.

Collective bargaining was often subjected to unitary nation-building programmes (Anstey 1997b, 400) and, where the public sector was concerned (by far the largest sector of the formal economy), governments did normally set wages and working conditions unilaterally (ICFTU 1989). Later on, externally prescribed adjustment measures obviously stood in the way of independent collective bargaining (Fashoyin 1991, 113). In the heydays of the one-party state, trade unions – side by side with other mass organisations more or less under control of the single party – were acting or supposed to be acting on behalf of 'all the workers' including the non-unionised ones, including all sorts of categories of workers outside the formal sector, etc. They were involved in wages, income and employment policies at national level, but also in many other aspects of national policies and development planning.<sup>5</sup> This 'trade union participation in development' often occurred in tripartite or similar institutions in which trade unions were given the illusion that they shared decision-making powers but were in fact mostly used by party or government to justify decisions already taken and to sell them to the masses. However, they were also able to bring home certain achievements for the workers. It is difficult to point out with precision where unions failed or succeeded to play a more or less independent role, but in general it may be observed that trade unions were seldom totally subjected to party control: they were inventive in keeping at least certain margins (Shadur 1994; Henley 1989; Sidibé and Venturi 1997).

The high 'ideological loading' and the indoctrinating party control which accompanied the first phases of participatory development had laid a weak basis. Participation was introduced by (presidential) decrees, was not legalised except in a few cases and, if legalised, its legal powers were not strong enough to counter company laws inherited from colonial times. This made the participation process highly vulnerable to manipulation by government. 'Responsible participation' sought to co-opt civil society, in particular the trade unions, with a view to procuring the backing for objectives already determined by the single party or the military regime. The fate of the post-independence mobilising regimes in Africa is widely known. Democratically won power corrupted those in power. There was a shift from utopia to slogan, from slogan to dogma, from dogma to repression, from repression to dictatorship and sometimes to tyranny. The deterioration of participation echoed this spiral, moving from economic and social liberation to manipulation and from manipulation to exploitation. Perhaps the most telling notion was that of *responsible participation*, a gimmick used by authoritarian one-party or non-party states in French-speaking countries to co-opt or coerce trade unions, 'production committees', and a range of national consultative committees to execute party policies at the place of work and at national level. (See Box 1.1 for the example of Ghana.) In other countries trade unions were side-tracked, when governments introduced directly elected workers' committees or works councils by legislation – easier to control, for

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5 Particularly in the French-speaking countries; see, for instance, Martens 1994.



instance in Zambia and in Zimbabwe, where the trade union federations refused to become integrated in the party.<sup>6</sup>

### **Box 1.1 The case of Ghana**

... The colonial era witnessed an extension of the capitalist or mercantilist models of labour relations. The Gold Coast (Ghana) represented an important economic and commercial interest to the British. The relatively poor working conditions and discrimination against the indigenous labour force had triggered series of labour strikes against the colonial administration. With time, this labour struggle for better working conditions had developed into demands for complete political independence in alliance with the Convention People's Party (CPP) led by Dr Kwame Nkrumah. Being a mass party, the CPP, backed strongly by organised labour and other nationalist groups, won political independence for the country in 1957 ...

... In the immediate post-independence era, the parameters of workers' participation were defined by the marriage of convenience that existed between the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the ruling CPP, in which the former was grossly subordinated to the latter. As a mass party, the CPP ensured that all facets of society, including the labour movement, became the bedrock of the party ... As the junior partner of an alliance that was based more on political expediency than on serving the interests of the workers, the TUC was relied upon to operate a workers' participation regime that sought to mobilise workers to support the development programmes of the CPP. This form of participation ... was in fact, a cosmetic arrangement aimed essentially at promoting the interests of the ruling party, by using the TUC as a vehicle for bringing the militancy of the workforce under control ... In effect, trade union autonomy and freedom of action became seriously compromised on the altar of political expediency, thereby setting the stage for the constant manipulation of labour by successive post-independence regimes ...

... This situation continued until the emergence of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government in 1981 through a military putsch ... However, unlike the CPP, the PNDC failed to receive the full and sustained support of the leadership of the TUC. ... Being very much a populist regime and as part of its efforts to transform the face of labour relations, the PNDC issued a decree for the formation of People's/Workers' Defence Committees (PWDCs) in all communities and work places throughout the country by 1982 ... The PWDCs ran parallel to the existing trade union and worker participation structures; the former representing a subtle attempt on the part of the ruling government to change the face and the form of labour organisation and representation in the country. Being organs of state power, the PWDCs became very powerful owing to the political support they received from the ruling PNDC government ... The PNDC issued yet another decree to introduce other forms of workers' participation, notably the Interim Management Committees, Joint Consultative Committees and Administrative Management Councils ...

6 The arguments here presented are set out more elaborately in earlier APADEP publications; see Kester and Sidibé 1997, Chapter 1, and Adu-Amankwah and Kester 1999, 8–9 and 83–5.

... However ... the PWDCs did not derive their mandate from workers, nor were their members democratically elected. The PWDCs and other workplace bodies as spelt out above were created purposefully to push and advance the political agenda of the PNDC government, ... they were used to counter the leadership of the labour unions and the TUC as part of the PNDC regime's grand strategy to curb the militancy of the traditional labour unions in order to make way for the smooth implementation of the government's austere economic reform programme (Structural Adjustment Programme), with its attendant harsh and deleterious consequences for labour in particular ...

... To this end, the use of force or threat to settle industrial disputes and the application of intrigue and subterfuge in government's dealing with trade unions and other labour organisations became the order of the day. Violations of collective bargaining agreements by the government have occurred most significantly with regard to methods and modalities for implementing retrenchment and also for cutting back on or on freezing wages. ... In all these, the PWDCs and other workplace organs created by the government were used to divide the workers' front and in some cases also to counter workers' agitations for better conditions of service. In effect, workers' participation as introduced by the PNDC regime had increasingly come to be perceived as a sham if not a ploy designed to legitimise the regime's despotic rule and ensure its survival in power. The return of the country to democratic rule in 1992 gave democracy, and for that matter democratic participation, a fresh boost and, with it, democratic workers' participation. The democratisation process has made some significant progress over the last couple of years. At least it has created a favourable constitutional paradigm and framework for the trade union movement and workers to consciously contribute to national development through their involvement in decision making at the levels of the enterprise and the wider society ...

Source: Gumah and Agbesinyale 2000, excerpts from pages 11–17.

### *Africa under adjustment*

Structural adjustment and its stablemate, neo-liberalism, came onto the scene in the early 1980s. They have dominated the continent's economic and social development ever since. The difficulty of defining a sound economic policy which could warrant a durable and sustainable growth for medium and long-term periods (Benachenhou 1991) paved the way for Africa's foreign development partners such as the World Bank and the IMF to impose structural adjustment programmes (SAPs).

There is an abundant literature on SAPs and we will only briefly summarise here the major aspects.<sup>7</sup> The most striking measure implemented by the SAPs was the reduction of the public sector's importance in the economies through privatisation of the state-owned enterprises. By the time SAPs were launched, the public sector represented 70 to 75 per cent of the formal economy. Thus, the reduction of this sector meant either retrenchment or lay-offs of thousands of workers from the parastatal enterprises and government civil services. Under adjustment, real wage development was on the decline, starting from 1987 for most of the countries, except for Zambia where the decline started from 1980 (van der Geest and Wignaraja 1996, 46–50).

7 See Galarraga and Gogué 1997, 71–105, for a succinct survey of the history, main features and consequences of structural adjustment, from a labour relations point of view.

This was due to an increase in borrowing interest rates, the reduction of government expenses and the suppression of subsidies on basic consumer products. Expenditure for education and health care was reduced. Since adjustment programmes did not have specific measures to protect the poor against their negative consequences, the level of poverty has increased in most countries, with most of the poor living in rural areas (Lensink 1996, 117).<sup>8</sup>

Structural adjustment and its corollaries, privatisation and liberalisation, put an end to socialist experiments, and the notion of a 'no-nonsense' private enterprise became a key reference. In countries where participation was legalised or formalised, this mostly referred to the public sector. This sector was now being transformed into parastatal or private enterprises; existing works councils or worker-on-the-board schemes often simply disappeared, while in the remaining public enterprises participation could no longer count on party or government support. Indeed, most private and privatised African enterprises today correspond to the classical image of unfettered capitalism with the correlated norm that the property-less wage and salary earners must place themselves at the disposal of the changing and fluctuating labour demands of employers and managers (Fox 1974b, 160). The decision-making prerogatives of management remain unquestioned and management authority rests on the normative agreement that, in entering into a contract of employment, the employee legitimises the employer in directing and controlling his activities (Ross 1969, 13). Collective bargaining can take place on the terms of the employment contract but, beyond that, all organisational, personnel and production decisions, as well as decisions on the medium and long-term future of a workplace, remain unchallenged. The labour relations parties had to re-orient themselves altogether. Privatisation produces employers and managers who are not accountable to a government or party hierarchy, and who operate independently in a free market environment rather than in a planned economy. The new private owners (as well as the managers) of the new-style public enterprises want to run the place as they deem fit and are at best prepared to enter into negotiation with trade unions on the terms of the employment contract and on a number of basic working conditions.

Structural adjustment, necessary by itself but planned and executed by the World Bank and IMF and partner governments without adequate consultation with the social structures involved, had a dramatic impact on labour relations. Many workers had found secure employment, irrespective of productivity, in the formal sector and enjoyed additional indirect advantages such as food subsidy, health and education packages, housing schemes, etc. Through structural adjustment and privatisation, competitiveness and productivity criteria forced reduction in the number of those employed in the formal sector. Many of the employees who stayed no longer enjoyed a stable employment contract and had to accept more flexible arrangements instead, including temporary contracts, part-time work, home work, etc. Most subsidies and other advantages were much reduced or discontinued altogether. Trade unions had to run to the support of the many dismissed, and found themselves alone in a struggle to maintain respect for the social dimensions of structural adjustment.

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8 In Togo, for instance, between 1987 and 1989 32 per cent of the population was considered to be living below poverty level (World Bank 1996, 14).

*Democracy gives new hope to Africa*

The consequences of structural adjustment were controversial. Suffering had increased and the debts had piled up, and privileges had continued to be showered on a tiny elite who seized the property of the state, claiming that they could manage it better themselves. Open protest was suppressed, and the people's sense of injustice became increasingly deep-seated. The end of the cold war gave neo-liberalism an extra boost. But hopes soared once again when 'democracy' became the new principle underpinning the organisation of change, and most of the people who poured onto the streets to call for democracy did so because they were weary of bad management, nepotism, embezzlement of public funds and a failure to observe human rights. This intensification of popular pressure indicated that people no longer had confidence in the state (Sidibé et al. 1994, 83).

Trade unions were thrown into wild waters: finally liberated from party tutelage, they found themselves trapped too exclusively in the formal sector where they had built up their membership base. They now have to cater with priority for the immediate wage and employment interests of their members. The workers in the formal sector are no longer automatically trade union members, as automatic check-off is mostly abolished. Trade unions now *have* to cater for the remaining members lest they would lose *also* them. Many trade unionists are often not familiar with collective bargaining and have no trained skills for it. Under these circumstances, a first urgent task for the trade union movement is to get collective bargaining functioning and much of present-day energy is invested in this area. But otherwise, management gets *de facto carte blanche* to run the enterprise as they please.

This immense challenge presents itself just at a time when the African trade union movement is going through a process of major change. Having shaken off party or government control, unions in many countries are now fighting to find their place in the new democratic order. The move towards autonomy and democracy goes hand in hand with trade union pluralism. Trade union rights have had to be redrawn and defended and, following the withdrawal of (official or disguised) government subsidies and the automatic 'check-off' system, widespread lay-offs have led to unions losing members and income.

If the trade union challenge in the formal sector is already formidable, its role in the much larger informal sector is even more exacting. With the advent of structural adjustment and multiparty democracy, governments are no longer making pacts with trade unions and other mass organisations, but with Bretton Woods and private capital. Trade unions had been involved in much more than just in representing their members, properly speaking. A good example of this broad societal role of trade unions was when the outburst of anger of the population of many countries against the single- or no-party state was often channelled through trade union organisations (Sidibé and Venturi 1997). Trade unions are now the representatives of their *members* in the first place, and much less the representatives of the *working masses*. The deepening of the economic crisis in the 1980s had already forced the trade unions into a defensive position, engaged as they were in a desperate battle to defend at least the most basic interests of their members: employment and income.

In present debate, the sum of all miseries is captured under the concept of globalisation and its consequences. Globalisation, says Robert Cox, has structured the world in a three-part hierarchy. At the top are those who are integrated in the global economy, including the relatively privileged workers in stable jobs. At the second level we find those who pick some grains of the global economy like part-timers, casual workers, temporary contract workers; in short, all atypical workers. At the bottom are those who are excluded from the global economy, the superfluous labour (quoted in van Stijn 2002, 342). Africa is conspicuously represented at the bottom. Full-time unemployment is reported to officially stand at 37 per cent of the economically active population in Africa; some researchers recently estimated the figure at over 40 per cent and, 'taking into consideration the extent of casualisation and atypical employment, it can be estimated that regular full-time occupations currently employ less than one-half of the economically active population' (Bramble and Marchiesi 2003, 3). And even then, the wage and salary earners are impoverished throughout the continent since real incomes dropped as a result of rising inflation, sudden and often massive devaluations as well as through the withdrawal of price controls and food and other subsidies (Mihyo and Schiphorst 1995, 193). Exploitative labour practices and working conditions are common practice on the African continent, as will be described in Chapter 5. Add to this the rising unemployment and decreasing real wage levels and the picture of a process of increasing inequality and social injustice on the continent is complete (Fernandez Jilberto and Riethof 2002, 15). In 1960 20 per cent of the world population living in the richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest 20 per cent of the world. By 1995, this had increased to 82 times as much (van Stijn 2002, 342). And Africa is hit particularly hard. There is no part of the world, observes Thomas, where labour markets offer a gloomier outlook to those seeking work and income (Thomas 1995, 239). Trapped between a withdrawing state and trade unions that cannot provide the necessary answers and cannot win the battle for employment, the workforce is left to the forces of globalisation: 'the drifting off of an entire continent is the clearest sign that it is time that the ideology of globalisation was resisted' (van Stijn 2002, 351).

Box 1.2 suggests some literature that explores this situation.

### **African Labour Relations in Transition**

The Nigerian researcher Damachi has set an important tone for the study of industrial relations in Africa. In several volumes he proves to be an adept of the classical industrial relations theory of the American Dunlop, a theory which has left its marks on the analysis of industrial relations around the world (Damachi 1974; Damachi 1985; Damachi et al. 1979). Essentially, Dunlop delineates industrial relations as the study of interaction of three major groupings of actors: managers and their representatives, workers and their representatives, and specialised government agencies, who interact to establish and apply rules concerning specific terms and conditions of employment at the place of work and in the work community, obviously in a wider context of power, technology and markets (Dunlop 1958).

**Box 1.2 Further reading on the recent history of Africa's labour relations**

An APADEP publication, *Trade Unions and Sustainable Democracy in Africa*, published in 1997, presents the case of 10 African countries. The authors, most of whom are African trade unionists or researchers, analyse the major trends of trade unionism and labour relations since independence in their respective countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Togo. All have put the emphasis on the last decade of the 20th century (up to 1997), analysing the process of democratisation and developments in trade unionism and participation, within the context of socio-economic development (Kester and Sidibé 1997).

In four introductory chapters, more generalised observations are made on sub-Saharan Africa. One chapter deals exclusively with the role of trade unions in bringing about the winds of democratic change. That role was much more important than is generally believed or known. The authors, Ousmane Oumarou Sidibé (who was Labour Minister in Mali) and Brigitte Venturi, show that trade unions have for a long time been agents of democracy and have again contributed to the restoration of democracy in the early 1990s: they quote more than 20 African countries where trade unions have played important roles in the democratisation process.

The book also scrutinises structural adjustment from a labour point of view. It presents a handy summary of the causes and nature of structural adjustment and pays full attention to the prescriptive role of the Bretton Wood institutions. But the authors of another chapter, Raoul Galarraga and Aimé Tchabouré Gogué (who was Planning Minister in Togo), put full emphasis on the criticisms of structural adjustment, on its social cost and its impact on employment and income. The courageous but rather ineffective trade union resistance is also described and analysed, and proposals are launched for a more effective response of the national and international trade union movement.

More recent works that may be consulted mostly refer to South Africa, such as the book *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa* by Adler and Webster (2000), *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the New South Africa*, by Bramble and Barchiesi (2003), and *Transition from Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa* by Von Holdt (2003). Recent books with a more general Third World orientation on unionism and labour relations include *Labour Relations in Development* by Fernandez Jilberto and Riethof (2002), and *Organised Labour in the 21st Century* by Jose (2002). References may be found at the end of this book.

Whilst Dunlop recognised that each actor can be expected to have their own ideology, the actors together should have a common understanding about the rules of the game as *the industrial relations system* would thus obtain legitimacy. This theory, often refined and revised but not essentially changed,<sup>9</sup> has remained a powerful intellectual instrument for many decades in Western countries and beyond (Meltz

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9 See Adams, 1991. A major enrichment of the theory was made by Kochan et al. who identified the locus of different types and focuses of decision making by levels of authority for all three actors, identifying differing objectives, strategies and industrial relations activities at these various levels within the hierarchies of management, trade unions and government (Kochan et al. 1986, 16).

1991), is enshrined in the ILO structure, and is deeply and generally engrained in the labour legislation of industrialised as well as most industrialising countries. This traditional industrial relations model applies to the formal sector in which collective bargaining, industrial action and tripartism at national level are central, and where trade unions play membership-centred roles. The model is 'operational': it has clearly identifiable power centres and an institutionalised framework, often backed up by legal provisions.

Applied to Africa, this conception of industrial relations appeared an uneasy straitjacket. Collective bargaining, the mainstay of Dunlop's model, has always been weak in Africa. The labour relations arena is of course much wider than suggested by the Dunlop-inspired industrial relations theory. Further conceptualisation in industrialised countries has widened the terrain of industrial relations (from now on rather to be labelled 'labour relations') to include situations wherever people are employed to do work, extending it to all aspects of the employment relationship.<sup>10</sup> Yet this wider conceptualisation normally referred to persons with a *formal* employment contract and left out all those who work in an employment *relationship* but without any contract. It was the International Institute of Labour Studies (IILS), a research institute of the ILO, which demonstrated way back in the early 1970s that conventional Dunlop theory could only be applied to a very small proportion of labour relations in the Third World and which launched a much wider perspective on labour relations which included not only persons in an informal employment relationship, but also subsistence farmers, housewives and the self-employed (Cox 1971).<sup>11</sup> Using this perspective, labour relations were defined as 'social relations of production ... a distinct set or pattern of power relations surrounding production' (Harrod 1988, 41). In this conception, labour relations apply to anyone who performs work. In a seminal work on Third World labour relations Harrod distinguishes not less than 12 different patterns of labour relations. In six of these ('subsistence production', 'peasant-lord', 'primitive labour market', 'enterprise labour market', 'self-employed' and 'household production'), workers are unprotected: they have not been able to develop sufficient individual or social power to resist domination and secure a degree of protection. In many Third World countries (including almost all countries of Africa south of the Sahara), Harrod estimates, not less than 85 to 90 per cent of the workers work under conditions of these six labour relations patterns (Harrod 1987, 39–40).

Also, Marxist researchers took a much wider view of labour relations, and produced a number of class-oriented studies on working-class formations (Sandbrook and Cohen 1975; Southall 1988) concentrating on how to restructure society in abolishing the dominating role of profit, in establishing worker control over society

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10 See Poole 1986; Kochan et al. 1986. See Finnemore and van der Merwe 2003 for an up-to-date overview of the widening of the concept of labour relations in African perspective.

11 As this far broader definition implied a criticism of the traditional ILO structure which was organised along typical Dunlopian industrial relations in industrialised countries, the IILS 'futurology research' was discontinued, but its researchers continued their work in other institutions and published numerous volumes with further theoretical insights (Cox 1987; Harrod 1987; Harrod 1988, Harrod and O'Brien 2002).

and in eliminating gross disparities in income and living conditions (Hyman 1975). But, says Fashoyin, because of their focus on labour–management conflict as a consequence of class struggle, Marxist researchers have generally neglected the actual processes of labour relations (Fashoyin 1991, 112) or, says Anstey, this discussion became centred in ideological debate (Anstey 1997b, 15) or worse, says Berger, Marxists ‘investigated questions to which they already believed to know the answers’.<sup>12</sup> These dismissive remarks about Marxism related, obviously, to the political application of Marxist theory and not to its widely recognised contribution to the development of social science.

Box 1.3 provides some points towards major works in this controversial field.

### Box 1.3 Further reading on labour relations theory in Africa

African labour relations research flourished in the 1960s and to a lesser extent in the 1970s, but disappeared more or less in the decades thereafter. Single-party or military control of universities discouraged independent research or, inversely, encouraged researchers who were willing to justify if not to glorify the policy of Party or State. Theory formation in the immediate post-independence years was to a large extent concentrated at the Industrial Relations School of the University of Lagos where Damachi’s theories (see Bibliography at the end of this book) were much based on research in the formal sector and inspired by Anglo-Saxon system theory formation. Most subsequent publications were produced by non-Africans, and it is only during the last 10 years of the 20th century that a real upsurge of African labour research and theorising can be noted.

An important role was played by the African Chapter of the International Industrial Relations Association (IIRA), with generous full support of the International Labour Organisation. This Association organised a number of pan-African conferences: in 1988 in Lagos, in 1997 in Harare, in Cape Town in 2002, and in Mauritius in 2005. The proceedings of the first conference were published as *Industrial Relations and African Development*, edited by Tayo Fashoyin (1992), a book that contains many chapters on independent research and theorising, on Africa in general, and on specific countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and Sudan. The IIRA 2002 and 2005 African Conference presentations were published on its website by the IIRA. Many publications by members of the IIRA network continue to come out.

On state corporatist labour relations one may consult a book by M. Shadur, *Labour Relations in a Developing Country: A Case Study on Zimbabwe*, published in 1994. Although the book is primarily on Zimbabwe, it contains many more generalised observations on African labour relations. The study is a painstaking, almost exhaustive treatise on state corporatism and its significance for trade unions and labour. The book is rich in references to literature on corporatism.

More recently, a lot was and is being published in South Africa, with reference to its specific post-apartheid situation. The end of the apartheid regime in 1994 caused a tremendous push to researchers to publish about labour relations, to no small degree

12 Berger 1986 as quoted in Anstey 1997b, 14.



triggered by the fierce public debate following the launching of a new labour bill in 1995. One publication which has a significance for Africa as a whole is that of Mark Anstey – *Labour Relations in Transition*, published in 1997. The book is an introduction to the comparative study of industrial and labour relations in the industrialised countries as well as in Africa, relating theory to practice, and with a long chapter on globalisation, new technology and the transformation of work relations. See also the works of Von Holdt (2003), Bramble and Barchiesi (2003) and Adler and Webster (2000), mentioned in Box 1.2, also Sonja Bendix's *Industrial Relations in South Africa*, and Finnemore and van de Merwe's *Introduction to Labour Relations in South Africa*, coming out regularly in updated and revised editions. See the Bibliography at the end of this book.

*Conclusion: the state of the art of African labour relations at the start of the 21st century*

Fukuyama, despite the controversies implied in his publications on the effects of the end of the cold war (Fukuyama 1992), has been very instrumental in demonstrating that a new way of thinking, of theorising, is unavoidable, also for labour relations. The difference between mainstream classical industrial relations theories on the one hand, and the wider societal labour relations conceptions on the other, had hidden or explicit ideological underpinnings. The first was liberal market-oriented, the second put more emphasis on state intervention, through social if not socialist policy. Neo-liberal globalisation has shaken up established ways of thinking on labour relations, and not less, has shaken up established labour relations institutions. In industrialising countries including Africa, but also in industrialised countries, in the West, in the East, in the North, in the South.

The labour relations landscape in Africa today is indeed very different from that in the past. In Figures 1.1 and 1.2 an oversimplified sketch is given of the labour relations scene in the first decades after independence (indicative, but very roughly, of the period 1950–85) and the actual situation (indicative, very roughly, of the period 1985 to the present) respectively.

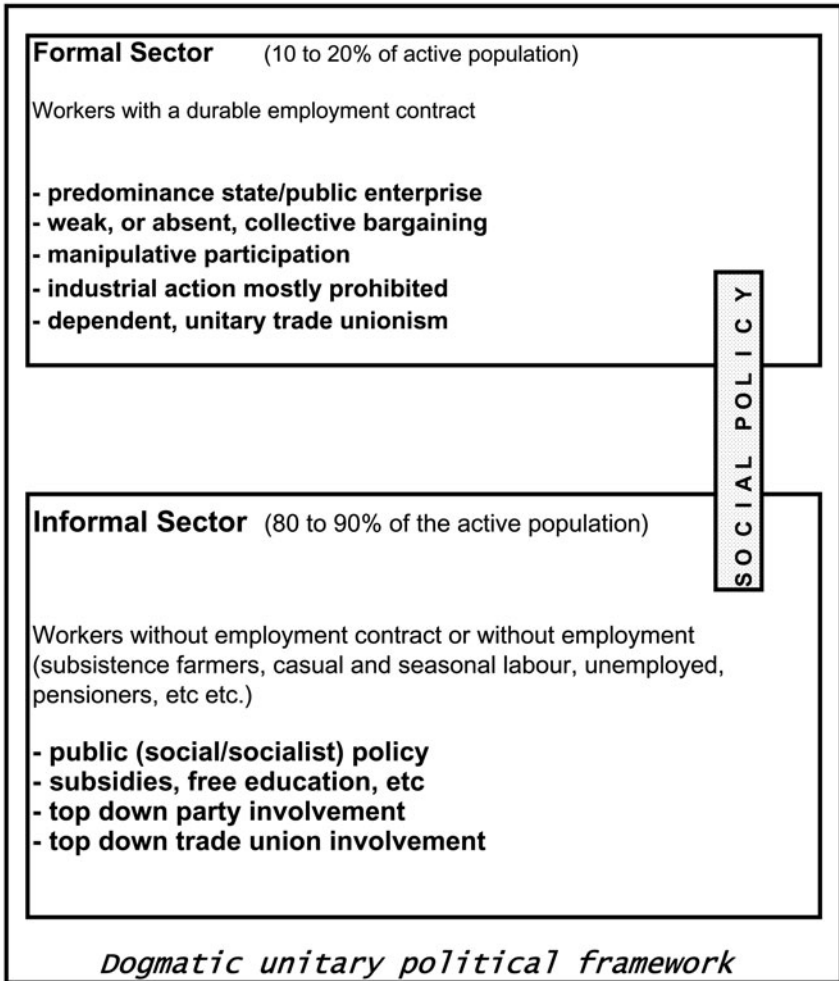
As was explained when reviewing post-independence labour relations in Africa, these relations were long characterised by state corporatism. Figure 1.1 sketches the typical situation in many African countries under these conditions. Those who worked in the formal sector enjoyed a high degree of employment security (often, school/university leavers were guaranteed employment in the large public sector). The terms of the employment contract and the conditions of work were determined by public (party) policy rather than by collective bargaining. Other working conditions were subject to manipulative participation. Trade unions were incorporated into party or state frameworks; industrial action was almost always prohibited. The number of persons working in the formal sector may be counted as 10 to 20 per cent of the active population. The other 80 to 90 per cent did not work under any regular employment contract: they were (and are) self-employed, subsistence farmers, unemployed or otherwise marginalised persons. Their conditions were determined by public (social, often 'socialist') policy, where trade unions represented the 'working masses' in manipulative national, regional and local participation frameworks under party

tutelage, within dogmatic unitary political frameworks or under (military) dictatorial rule.

The combination of structural adjustment, neo-liberal perspectives, privatisation, democratisation, globalisation and reduction of the role of the state (de-etatisation), created a radically different situation, as sketched in Figure 1.2. Those working in the formal sector are less numerous because of massive retrenchments, their employment contracts are less secure or are 'flexible' in the rapidly expanding private sector. The terms of employment contract and working conditions have to be negotiated.

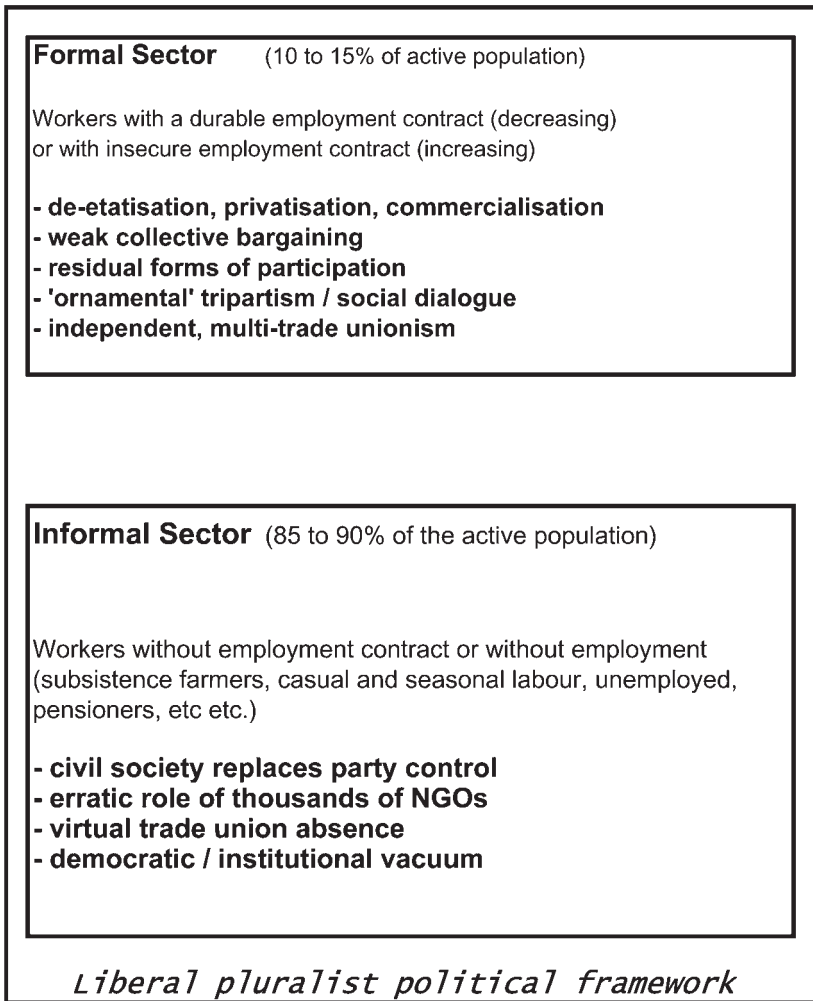
Industrial relations institutions regulating the conditions and terms of employment of the 'regularly employed' (collective bargaining, related industrial action, arbitration, traditional tripartism, and so on) have to be made functional again, which is difficult if only because the workers have hardly any power to mobilise. Africa has not been able to consolidate much of its participatory experience, which was largely manipulative anyway, as explained earlier. Under structural adjustment, participation became a notion associated with bad management, and was seen as an error for which previous governments were to blame. Where worker participation was not legalised it was defenceless. Where it was legalised or formalised, this referred mostly to the public sector which is shrinking or being reformed into joint ventures. In the growing private, privatised or parastatal sector, worker participation is now low profile or no longer in existence. Many trade unions do not have a grudge against this: having obtained independence of party or state, and having experienced the manipulations under the old regimes, anything smacking of 'participation' could not turn them on. The upshot is that workers can at best negotiate terms of employment under collective bargaining, but beyond that, all decisions relating to personnel, organisation, production and commerce lie completely outside labour control. At the same time, management is building up human resources techniques, if possible linked to forms of company corporatism, in an attempt to come to terms with the workers directly (or less politely expressed, to get rid of trade unions). Thus the common ground between management and unions (democratically agreed procedures to regulate disagreement) come more and more under pressure.

And at national level the erstwhile consultations in the framework of one-party or no-party states no longer take place, or are conducted in largely ornamental tripartite structures. The workers and citizens in the informal sector do not benefit much from social policy, if at all. The informal sector is a labour buffer zone that absorbs the effects of the labour market. Workers in the formal sector do not earn enough in their job to make a living. This leads to their involvement in informal jobs and to the participation of all family members out of economic need (Fernandez Jilberto and Riethof 2002, 4). Indeed, the family household, the village, is the social welfare system in Africa. Van Stijn argues this will not function forever. When today, she says, the best defence against poverty is support from the family, the clan or the village, the burden will become too great when the unemployed start to outnumber the employed, and the family will no longer be able to provide the basic needs of relatives (van Stijn 2002, 350). Going by the research results reported in this book (see Chapter 5), such outnumbering is the rule rather than the exception!



**Figure 1.1 State corporatist African labour relations (1950–85)**

Social policy under the state corporatist model linked, in some way, the formal sector to the informal sector: the interests of all workers, whatever their contract status, and indeed all citizens were taken into account. ‘Social movement trade unionism’, as mentioned earlier, was a form of representation beyond the narrower interests of only the trade union members in the formal sector. Income and price policies and mass access to social services (education, health, safety, and so on) were, *in principle*, regular items of the social policy agenda in which the trade unions were involved. But these social policies were *de facto* highly manipulative (*also* in terms of trade union involvement) as well as economically unfeasible.



**Figure 1.2 Liberal African labour relations (1985–2000+)**

But now, those working and living outside the formal employment contract sector, an estimated 85 to 90 per cent of the population, have no form of representation of their interests, and indeed no democratic procedures exist which could allow them to have access to decisions affecting them – except through highly controversial periodic national elections. They live in a democratic and institutional vacuum. The new political parties have mostly no roots (or not yet) in society, and are replaced by ‘civil society’, whose main manifestations are the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which lack transparency and democratic procedure. Many NGOs have sprung up to assist the informal sector but this has led to a ‘cacophony’ of mostly donor-controlled and often undemocratic sectional organisations which have no binding organisms to make representations at regional or national level (Monga 1994).

## The Scope and Structure of this Book

The background and nature of the research project reported in this book may be briefly explained here and will be referred to in more detail in Chapter 4. Around 20 years ago an educational programme for worker participation was set up for trade unions in a number of African countries: the African Workers' Participation Development Programme (APADEP). This programme was soon extended to include research in different degrees of intensity, in Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Research consisted of questionnaire surveys (among trade union activists and elected trade union representatives), of case studies and of trend studies. These research activities were part of a rolling scheme of national trade union education projects and spread out over a long period of time: from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. A number of them, as well as new ones, are continuing to date.

APADEP's research agenda was planned in two major phases. The first concentrated on democratic worker participation in the formal sector where most trade union activity was located. The second research effort, now under way, is addressing the challenge of worker and trade union participation in the informal sector. This book brings the major results of the research that focused on workplace democracy and trade union policy together. All studies have by now been published as national reports (Diallo et al. 1992; Sidibé et al. 1994; Coulibaly et al. 2000; Agbesinyale 2000a; Schiphorst 2001; Chambua 2002; Dopavogui et al. 2003; Reis and Rodrigues 2003; Kaboré 2006). Use will be made of the results of the questionnaires administered among more than 8,500 respondents (most of them grassroots trade union representatives) and 40 case studies of enterprises in the countries mentioned above. These studies offer the possibility of comparative exploration of the state of the art of workplace democracy. The studies are distributed over different parts of Africa (South, South-East and West), in counties with varying labour relations patterns and trade union traditions ('francophone', 'lusophone' and 'anglophone') and they accumulate a wide range of forms of formal and informal workplace democracy. The comparative data constitute a sufficient basis for a generalised comparative *appreciation* of the functioning of workplace democracy and the role of the trade unions therein, but do of course not allow *generalisation* for sub-Saharan Africa.

The structure of the book is organised in three parts: setting the background of the research project and its underlying theory, presenting the learning experiences in different countries and, in conclusion, assessing the broad implications of the research findings for policy making on workplace democracy, with particular emphasis on the role of trade unions.

Part 1 begins with the present chapter on major trends in the development of labour relations in Africa since political independence, sketching the past 40 to 50 years. The second chapter presents a similar sweep of history, but focusing in much greater detail on the development of policies and various forms of workplace democracy in Africa. The two following chapters deal with workplace democracy research; Chapter 3 is conceptual, surveying the main definitions of workplace democracy and describing its main forms, and it launches a theory on the 'dynamics

of the participation process'; Chapter 4 pictures the evolution of the research design and methods of the projects undertaken in the context of APADEP over the past 20 years. It also presents details on the method and the sampling of the questionnaire research and of the case studies.

Part 2 displays the major descriptive comparative research results. Chapters 5 and 6 provide facts and figures on conditions of work and employment and on the degree of worker satisfaction with these, and on the trade union condition in the countries surveyed, assessing internal trade union democracy, trade union activity, information, communication and access to resources. Chapters 7 and 8 are entirely based on the results of case studies of experience with workplace democracy in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In these countries workplace democracy is practised in 'voluntary' or 'casual', seldom 'statutory', worker participation structures. Chapter 9 reports on opinion surveys conducted in seven countries on the valuation of workplace democracy, on attitudes to power relations and decision-making prerogatives. In Chapter 10 special attention is given to the gender of trade union representation and democratic participation, analysing the reasons for under-representation of women. This chapter is restricted to only one country, Ghana, and was written by Akua Britwum of the University of Cape Coast in Ghana.

Part 3 draws the lessons from the learning experiences. Analysing the shortcomings in the functioning of workplace democracy, a broad series of propositions is elaborated in Chapter 11 on how to make worker participation more meaningful, effective and democratic. Checklists are constructed for the improvement of design and structure of workplace democracy, for the improvement of its functioning, and for necessary investments to support workplace democracy and its development. Special attention is given to the relation of collective bargaining to other forms of worker participation, and to the relation of workplace democracy to trade union structures. Trade union policy is further investigated in Chapter 12, taking into account the expectations of the grassroots trade union representatives in the countries studied. The plethora of emerging issues is moulded into a trade union agenda. Chapter 13 discusses the focus, strategies and challenges that trade unions engage with and invites the reader to reflect on the way forward for African trade unionism. The waves of restructuring and casualisation have left the trade unions floundering and whether they would see workplace democracy as the immediate solution is questionable. Yet this chapter seeks to provide the insights for the urgent need to develop a serious trade union workplace democracy vision.

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## Chapter 2

# The Development of Workplace Democracy

'Industrial democracy', 'worker participation', 'labour management', 'co-operatives', 'workplace democracy', 'democratic participation' and so many other expressions of participatory labour relations have featured since the beginnings of industrialisation. The debate, the struggle, the practice – the victories and the defeats – have been constantly on the scene of industrialising Europe. And many of these experiences have been very well recorded.<sup>1</sup> After the Second World War, debate in Europe regained importance, not least as economic and social reconstruction demanded commitment and involvement of all social partners. This debate was widened to many other parts of the world: many countries achieved political independence and in their post-colonial development, economic and social reconstruction were no less important. The Third World has witnessed attempts by a number of countries to adopt a strategy of participatory development. As was briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, many Third World countries were inspired by Yugoslav self-management and its spectacular effect on economic growth, and also by social policy making in general in Europe.

This chapter will trace the history and development of Africa's experience with democratic participation. As much of that experience was in reference to European ideas and experiences, the chapter will start with a rapid sweep of history of developments in Europe.

### **Workplace Democracy in Europe: A Long History**

#### *Protest against exploitation and dependence in industrialising Europe*

During the early phases of industrialisation in Europe philosophers and other social scientists protested against the weak and dependent position of labour in the quickly growing industrial workplaces. And they theorised on alternatives. Buchez mounted the idea of 'republics in the workshop', Proudhon was a fervent advocate of bottom-up democracy in 'self-managed workers' associations' and launched the idea of a 'people's bank', whereas Saint Simon was in favour of greater state control on behalf of the workers. They, and many other writers of that time were later called the *utopian socialists*. The workers lacked the organisational skills and, above all,

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<sup>1</sup> Vanek (1975) provides a concise overview of history and philosophy. For more detail see Bayat (1991).



the power base to run the workplaces themselves. The establishment of the Paris Commune in 1871 has remained the most eloquent hallmark of the many, often desperate, attempts by ordinary workers and citizens to obtain self-determination. Yet the foundations for theories as alternative to pure capitalism (the system of the time) were laid and some of them did have a more immediate impact. Robert Owen had advocated co-operative production and the Rochdale pioneers established the first lasting co-operatives of consumers.

The utopian socialists had aimed at *democratic control by workers*, in principle on a voluntary basis. Marxism propagated 'proletarian socialism', which aimed at *party control on behalf of the workers*, and ultimately, *workers' control*. Under this philosophy, capitalism had to be replaced by a revolution of the proletariat, which succeeded in the early 20th century in Russia and was later imposed in most of Central and Eastern Europe. But state bureaucracy and party indoctrination emerged instead of workers' control.<sup>2</sup> Monolithic ideology and party structures stood in the way of democratic development.

The grounds for democratic participation had been laid by the utopians, and these were worked out in later theorising and practice. One important stream was 'syndicalism', which propagated the control of industry by trade unions on behalf of the workers, to lead to control by the workers themselves (Bakunin 1972). And a very influential group of intellectuals, writers and scholars in the UK launched 'Fabian socialism'. Two of them of them published a book with a (for 1897) very 'modern' title, *Industrial Democracy* (Webb and Webb 1897), and a member of a splinter group of the Fabian Society, Guild Socialism, published *Self-Government in Industry*. The Fabians have had an important impact on the Labour Party in the UK but, during their time of writing, few of the proposals they made could be implemented. It was different in continental Europe, where both in Austria and Germany works councils were introduced and were operational over a long period of time.

But by and large, and apart from state socialism in Eastern Europe, a labour relations framework emerged in which the roles of (respectively) the employers, trade unions and government were rather sharply defined: the trade unions tried to negotiate the best deal for the workers without challenging the basic ownership structures and the right of ultimate control derived from them. Governments intervened through social legislation to assure at least minimum working conditions, safety and health, for workers. This pattern was then consolidated in the tripartite structure of the International Labour Organisation, in 1919. These tripartite labour relations have developed further since then and have become predominant in Western Europe and the US.

### *Theories of influence*

After the Second World War, debate in Europe regained importance. In labour relations theory a fundamental debate was triggered on the division of labour, production and organisation, under multiple perspectives, one of which concerned human relations in the enterprise. After an analysis of the impact of authority

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2 For an extensive analysis, see Bayat 1991, Chapters 4 and 5.

structure and technology on people, Blauner concluded that the strain of work alienation is endemic to the world of work and that industrial democracy should be a critical force for ending that alienation (Blauner 1964). Many other similar analyses inspired Carole Pateman to launch an influential theory of participatory democracy, postulating that participation is an integral part of democracy (Pateman 1970). She provided theoretical foundations for the democratisation of labour relations in the workplace, in particular through joint consultation and co-determination and also, more structurally, alternatives to the capitalist mode of production. Horvat developed a theory of self-managed firms and a self-managed economy (Horvat 1982), arguing that without a socialist political system full participation cannot be reached, but specifying that worker self-management is incompatible with state socialism, which should be replaced by self-governing socialism (Horvat et al. 1975). For Jaroslav Vanek ultimate industrial democracy (workers' self-management) was neither compatible with capitalism nor with socialism/communism. He developed a theory mainly for purely self-managed companies in which management is exercised by virtue of work and not by virtue of ownership (Vanek 1971, 20). Vanek, not opposed to private ownership of capital, rejects the principle that such ownership should yield exclusive rights to surplus appropriation and to control, and he develops a number of criteria regarding ownership as it relates to a self-managed company (Vanek 1975). Besides self-management there are many forms – described as participatory (*ibid.*, 15) – in which members partake in the management and exploitation of an enterprise: in between a purely self-managed firm and a purely capital-controlled one there is a broad spectrum of 'participatory' variants, and Vanek suggests that those participatory forms can constitute steps on the long way to finally reach pure self-management.

### *Theories put into practice*

From the 1950s onwards, many theories had a chance to be tested in practice in Europe. The growing concern over job alienation had led to the introduction and development of a number of forms of workers' participation at the shop-floor level, labelled variously 'job enrichment', 'autonomous work groups', etc. At higher organisational levels, mostly as a supplement to already existing industrial relations formats, institutions for labour–management consultation (works councils of various kinds) have been set up. There has been 'a general disenchantment' (ILO 1975) with consultative works councils, but not with participation at the shop-floor level. Comparing experience in some 15 countries, Walker argued that shop-floor participation was the most promising field of concentration (Walker 1974). And in effect, Nordic European countries established a tradition of socio-technical systems through which work teams give employees fairly substantial discretion to organise their own work and operate without supervision. Socio-technical ideas for the redesign of industrial workplaces were tried out in real-life (industrial) situations as part of a national strategy for the democratisation of work life in Norway (Emery and Thorsrud 1976). The Tavistock Institute and a series of related programmes, such as the Norwegian Industrial Democracy Programme, triggered long-term work–life reform efforts in the following decades, in many countries.

Another trend in the participation history in Western Europe was the attack on the power foundations of labour relations, due to increasing crises in the system. Allen Fox sharply analysed this. Many workers, he argued, no longer ‘trust’ the system in which ‘they are working for purposes they have not chosen themselves, for bosses they have not elected themselves, making products they frequently are not able to consume themselves’ (Fox 1974a). A number of factory occupations by workers illustrated the organisational powers of workers and made them more aware of the possibilities of self-determination (Poole 1986; Kester 1980). Workers started to assert themselves to obtain a greater impact on what happens in industrial decision making and this new impetus was often carried forward by their trade unions and sometimes translated by them into proposals for fundamental change.<sup>3</sup> Pressure was built up for the extension of worker participation on the boards of companies, and for various forms of economic democracy and self-management and eventually, by the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, many European countries had increasingly important participation frameworks (for an overview, see Poole 1986).

When worker participation was a dynamic and growing phenomenon in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, government, often in co-operation with trade unions, played an important role in its development, not only by passing legislation, or even changing the constitution as in Italy, but also by offering financial support and by facilitating participation schemes in the public sector and nationalised companies. Funding for education, training, academic research, etc., has considerably helped to spread and legitimate worker participation (Kester and Pinaud 1996, 2).

The development of workers’ self-management in Yugoslavia marked the first serious effort to introduce ‘ultimate’ industrial democracy on a national scale. Self-management envisages a radical distribution of power to workers. In the second half of the 20th century Yugoslavia became a unique terrain of study of the practice of self-management. Jan Vanek, evaluating the first decades of its experience, demonstrated that capital accumulation and use are linked to the needs of the workers of the firm and the wider social community, without impeding technological innovation, sound investment and high rates of economic growth. He concluded that an economic firm based on work (and not on ownership) and under control of its workers, can be a viable proposition (Jan Vanek 1970).

From the 1980s onwards further legally based support schemes for education and advice on participation were introduced. A most remarkable landmark was the adoption of European works councils in companies operating on a European scale, covering nearly 40 per cent of international companies (Kerckhofs 2002). The European Union makes important funds available via its directive on European

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3 The French CFDT trade union leader Edmond Maire wrote the book *Demain l'autogestion* [*Self-Management Tomorrow*] (Maire 1976), and the Dutch trade union federation NVV resolved to transform works councils into workers’ councils – governing bodies of the enterprise, elected by and from all workers in the firm – adding that ‘the road to workers’ self-management has to be cut open through the jungle of capitalism’ (NVV Congress resolution, 8 December 1977).

works councils.<sup>4</sup> By 2002 some 700 agreements had been signed to set up, monitor and support the take-off and development of these councils. It is fair to say that co-determination has come to stay on the European industrial relations scene.

### Stagnation

But the development of democratic participation started to stagnate. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a ‘participation striptease’ (Kester 1991b). Yugoslav self-management, which had made an impressive start in the 1960s and showed that a real alternative to the classical capitalist firm is possible, collapsed. The lack of a market economy disrupted earlier successes, increasing control by the Communist Party made the process less democratic, regional conflicts emerged and ethnic cleansing gave the final blow to a country that once was a proud reference for democratic participation. But other forms of participation and self-management, like the Mondragon Co-Operative System and many other co-operatives (Whyte and Whyte 1988; Cornforth et al. 1988), and many self-management firms in the US (Gunn 1984) have shown enough strength to survive and develop.

Enthusiastic support for democratic participation in other countries dwindled. A case in point is the European tradition of human-centred production. First Gorz, who once advocated workers’ control to combat alienation, surrendered and bid his *Adieu au prolétariat* [*Farewell to the Proletariat*], concluding that possibilities for self-realisation and self-development were no longer possible in work organisations (Gorz 1980). In the wake of globalisation, lean production and ‘Toyotism’ (application of the Toyota production system, with its leaderless work groups, total quality management and just-in-time inventory control) affected the human aspects of industrial production. In a fascinating study, Sandberg and his colleagues describe the lost fight in the Uddevalla Volvo plant in Sweden: they showed that human-centred production can be conceived in such a way that it accommodates lean production and achieves acceptable levels of efficiency, flexibility and productivity – yet the plant was closed (Sandberg 1995).

In the current ‘no-nonsense’ approach of neo-liberalism, privatisation and globalisation, the notion of participation is conspicuously absent. In the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, worker participation became associated with failed socialist systems in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The forces which proposed participation have been driven apart, misled or defeated by privatisation and its accompanying philosophy described as ‘Thatcherism’ (Kester and Pinaud 1996c, 1). Also in the 1980s, rising unemployment and de-regularisation of work contracts became priority concerns and trade unions in most countries took a hesitant, ambiguous, sometimes even hostile attitude to participation, and in any case remain divided over its aims, principles and forms (Pinaud 1996). In Europe, the *momentum* of trade union interest in participation was lost. During the same decades there was a rapid

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4 See Goetschy 1996, 27ff, for the intricacies and long saga of the interminable ‘Vredeling Directives’ and the adoption, in September 1994, of the EU directive concerning the creation of European works councils or employee information-consultation procedures in companies of European dimensions.

rise in management- and employer-initiated forms of organisational participation and financial participation, and international networks were set up by management and owners to strengthen and promote these types of participation. One of the intentional or accidental side effects was to short-circuit the elected representatives in the company (Pinaud 1996, 14).

### *The 'New Deal'*

The last decade of the 20th century has prompted a 'New Deal' for democratic participation. The accelerated change to a neo-liberal economy shifted the emphasis to initiation or encouragement by employers and governments for profit sharing and employee share-ownership schemes. In the 1980s the UK's Conservative government widely introduced 'people's capitalism' schemes. First studies showed that these schemes have tended to reduce the influence of workers in decision making and to start to erode collective bargaining, dividing different groups of workers in a 'thirst for gold' (Baddon et al. 1989). Blinder adds later that schemes of financial participation function better where combined with institutions of employee participation in decision making and that in particular, ESOPs are more likely to flourish in a participatory environment (Blinder 1990). Similarly, Central and Eastern Europe became a surprising laboratory of economic democracy. The privatisation wave that characterised this area was first expected to respond to classical capitalist paradigms, but a much wider range of ownership and management schemes sprang up. Empirical evidence was produced that financial participation schemes can lead to positive effects on the motivation and productivity of workers, as well as on organisational performance and innovation (Vaughan-Whitehead 1995), and the fears expressed by many policy advisors at the beginning of the transition regarding the negative implications of employee ownership were proven to be largely exaggerated (Uvalic and Vaughan-Whitehead 1997).

Sketching with large brushes the situation on the threshold of the 21st century, we may observe several main dimensions in the participation process. Human-centred direct worker participation is threatened by lean production (Sandberg 1995), and its development is mainly in hands of management initiative (Pinaud 1996). The internationalisation of worker councils in Europe was an important step forward but the current agenda of the trade union movement does not feature participation as a priority (Kester and Pinaud 1996a). The employers' camp has seized the initiative for developing worker participation linked to sharing in capital ownership and reward, at times with government support (Vaughan-Whitehead 1996a). Beyond the enterprise, more or less traditional tripartite consultation structures can yield important macro-social and economic results for workers (Visser and Hemerijck 1997), but are in dire need of restructuring and re-orientation (Treu 1992; Trebilcock et al. 1994).

Yet Albert argues that the Anglo-American form of capitalism is far more inequalitarian and less productive than capitalism as it is practised in 'Rhineland capitalism' (Scandinavia, Germany and the Benelux countries), which have a co-determination structure and score higher *combined* economic and social records (Albert 1991). Participatory forms in Europe have reached a critical mass, have developed into more democratic, meaningful and effective instruments of worker

representation, and have become self-perpetuating. Yet the road to adequate democratic governance of the workplace and the economy remains a long one.

## **The Development of Democratic Participation in Africa**

### *'The third way'*

As was stated in Chapter 1, the attainment of political independence in Africa and in many other countries in Asia and Latin America, opened opportunities for a new approach to labour relations. These opportunities were created by the nationalisation of former colonial property and by the need to mobilise the population for reconstruction and development. Worker participation was considered, in that context, a strategy for development. In Latin America, Chile's President Allende attempted to realise a democratic transition towards workers' self-management within the country's existing constitutional framework, introducing co-determination and self-management in nationalised industries (Raptis 1974; Espinosa and Zimbalist 1978). The brutal way in which these developments were halted – the infamous 1973 coup by Pinochet, inspired and supported by the CIA – shocked the world community. Chile's experiment was short-lived, but a much longer period of transition to self-management has been experienced in Peru, where the military regime which took over power after a coup in 1968 introduced major structural and institutional reforms in labour–management relations. The regime gave, in the early 1970s, high priority to the social property sector (where workers were given the right of control over management), proclaiming this sector as a model for the future and presenting it as 'a third way' between the two poles of capitalism and communism (Löwenthal 1975; Stephens 1980).

Other Third World cases of transition to self-management have received much less attention internationally. During the period of the Sri Lanka United Front Government (1970–77), forms of participation in management were introduced into public corporations, with the ultimate objective of a system of self-management. A gradual scenario of change was foreseen: the initial forms of participation in management were to be a 'conscientisation' tool with which to bring about changes in the social relations in production and in power relations: this was expected to help prevent undue bureaucracy in public sector enterprises and promote the involvement of employees at all levels in determining the objectives of the enterprise (Abeyasekera 1977). India has a long experience with consultative works councils in industry. The Committee on Participation and Equity, set up by the Indira Gandhi Government in 1977, considered that capital-controlled firms should be transformed into firms controlled by all involved, management and workers, thus realising the Mahatma Gandhi principle of trusteeship in which labour and capital function as mutual trustees and also as joint trustees of the community they serve (ICPE 1983a). The Turkish government in 1978–79 adopted a policy under which workers' self-management would be gradually introduced in public enterprises (Uca 1983). An intriguing development took place in Iran, where *shuras* [factory councils] created a climate for self-management and played an important role in the overthrow of

the Shah. The *shuras* were eventually ruthlessly crushed by Ayatollah Khomeini (Bayat 1987). There are many more 'third way' cases that may be mentioned, like the assertive policy of the Maltese Labour government to turn bankrupt or problem enterprises into participatory or self-managed ones (Kester 1980), and a number of other such experiences in Asia and Latin America (Stephens 1980; ICPE 1980; ICPE 1981; ICPE 1983a; ICPE 1983b; ICPE 1983c; ICPE 1985; Sirianni 1987; Prasnikaar 1991; Bayat 1991).

Box 2.1 presents a summary of two major examples of the theoretical approaches covered above.

### **Box 2.1 'The third way': theoretical considerations**

In viewing worker participation as a development strategy, two theories, among several others, have been very influential in the 1970s and 1980s in Europe and even more in the Third World. These are the theories of Jaroslav Vanek and Branko Horvat, who were also invited to be advisors in many Third World countries. Vanek's theory of 'transition to self-management' maps out the changing nature of the relationship between capital ownership, management and control of a company. The transition to self-management should come either 'from the left' (transforming the centrally planned socialist economy), or 'from the right' (transforming the capitalist market economy with private ownership). For the latter Vanek advocated a strategy of partial, assisted transition to self-management: partial, because a global transition, whereby the economy of a country as a whole would be transformed at once to a self-managed one, would be unlikely and even undesirable; assisted, on the grounds that self-managed firms could be hardly expected to grow and expand in a hostile environment unless they received government, trade union or other support (Jaroslav Vanek 1970, 320). Vanek's puzzle was: how does one arrive at a participatory economy in the real world, a world adhering almost without exception to other forms of economic organisation (Vanek 1971, 18)? On the question of how to strengthen the development of participation Vanek suggested that 'political and legal problems will not be insurmountable' and that 'the real difficulties and problems to be solved normally will be found in creating the appropriate institutions and putting them to work', that there will be 'resistance from many groups since they never experienced it [participation/self-management] in practice' and that 'a proper environment' has to be created (*ibid.*, 18–19). Transition to self-management is inconceivable without sufficient (government) assistance in view of the sustained support and shelter that is needed. He argued the need for a strong supporting structure for the development of participatory firms, an organisation which can give systematic and effective support in a situation of partial assistance – since a number of promotion, supervision, co-ordination and assistance functions have to be secured and performed, as a necessary condition for the realisation of self-management (Vanek 1970, 317ff).

Branko Horvat, who has written extensively (and critically!) on Yugoslav self-management, developed a theory of 'associative socialism' (developed in Horvat 1982), a democratic interpretation of Marxism. As, before independence, capital was in foreign (colonialist) hands, the liberation of a country implies the nationalisation of the means of production, national planning of the economy in a socialist market system. After the struggle for independence, a one-party system is unavoidable in order to overcome ethnic, economic and political contradictions. At the same time, Horvat warns against

the dangers of a single political party which may eventually usurp too much power and become dictatorial. Self-management cannot be introduced at once, but the process of democratisation of the nationalised enterprises should gradually enlarge the power of the workers until they would exert full democratic control of the workplaces in which they worked. The ownership of these firms should be in the hands neither of the state nor of the worker collectives: it should be 'social ownership': the enterprises belong to the society and should be subject to democratic public policy. Horvat considers it an error to suppress the market: a self-managed economy needs the market to guarantee the independence of worker collectives.

*Algeria, Egypt, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique: 'transformative worker participation'*

Theoretical and political debate was not much different in a number of African countries. Many newly independent countries proceeded to nationalise industry and services under a one-party, often revolutionary regime.

In a number of countries the state was under actual control of the party which co-opted trade unions in an attempt to take joint responsibility for the running of the nationalised firms in the interest of the workers and the country as a whole. In a number of these countries (like Guinea and Ghana), productivity committees were set up, controlled by the dominant party and meant to encourage workers to meet the production targets of national planning. In other countries governments claimed from the trade union movement a spirit of 'responsible participation' to keep possible unrest under control and win a co-operative workforce (this was the case in most French-speaking countries). In these cases participation was introduced as an instrument to assist the government/party in power to achieve its (planning) aims, and not as instruments of democracy from below. One might call these: 'integrative participation'.

In a small number of countries participation was introduced as an instrument to transform the political and economic order. The best-studied cases are those of Algeria, Tanzania, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia, whose charismatic leaders had developed a philosophy of 'liberating participation'. Economic motives were not absent in these countries: participation was expected to increase economic efficiency and production, but political motives were also very explicit. These included the following:

- to guarantee independent socio-economic development
- to create a just society with an egalitarian division of wealth and income
- to educate people and transform the social structure
- to involve workers in decision making and decrease alienation in the workplace
- to develop political democracy, training workers to identify themselves as equal political beings as a fundamental step to the development of democratic socialism (Prasnikar 1991, 34).



In Algeria, a revolutionary movement swept aside the *ancien régime* (Bayat 1991, 60). In 1962, the departing French owners and administrators left a vacuum which was filled by workers who wanted to save their jobs and to resume production (Clegg 1971, 40), first as a spontaneous move supported by the trade union federation (UGTA), then in a more institutionalised way through legislation which sought to bring about a new political structure. Algeria attempted the total reconstruction of industrial firms and the setting up of over 1,000 agricultural co-operatives in the late 1970s (Ghezali and Bouzida 1981). By 1974, through the Socialist Management of Enterprises Law, *autogestion* [self-management] was introduced in 57 enterprises employing over 400,000 workers. These firms were governed by executive boards, consisting of a general manager and advisors appointed by the state, and two representatives of workers. The highest authority was the assembly of workers, meeting twice a year and with a number of committees consisting of 50 per cent worker representatives and 50 per cent state-appointed managers. Thus the system was one of co-determination rather than of self-management, and ultimately (it would appear) it was state-controlled, as the government appointed the general manager and 'supervised the workers' assembly' (Ghezali and Bouzida 1981, 78). Self-management was also introduced on a large scale in agriculture (Mahsas 1975).

There are quite a few studies describing the Algerian system without presenting studies of the functioning of these new institutions (in particular the ICPE studies published in 1981 and 1983, and Ghezali 1977). The more independent attempts at evaluation reached rather devastating conclusions. Soon after the introduction Raptis, himself an advisor to the Algerian government and referring to the first years of experience (1963–64), observed that the state bureaucracy, protected by the Party and the trade unions, was 'worming its way' into the functioning of self-management, '... suppressed democracy ... and was seeking to reduce the workers to simple state employees' (Raptis 1980, 72–4). The Party had meanwhile 'incorporated' UGTA. The independent study by Clegg confirmed this; he reported that the important and large-scale industries were put under direct state management and when, in the beginning, workers attempted to increase their influence, their self-management firms soon came under the bureaucratic control of state managers (Clegg 1971, 73–4). Another study also referred to the emergence of a 'state bourgeoisie' which manipulated self-management to become a buffer between itself and the popular masses (Tlemcani 1986, cited in Bayat 1991). An exhaustive account of how democratic participation was reduced to a nominal formality was made by the Algerian researcher Boussoumah, who concluded that the self-management firms were simply reduced to socialist state enterprises (Boussoumah 1982), apparently to the relief of President Boumedienne who, in the early 1980s, wanted to 'put an end to anarchy, squandering and chaos in the self-management sector' (Bayat 1991, 80). State control followed.

In Egypt, after the military coup in 1952, the new leadership (nominating themselves 'the Free Officers') announced the Egyptian road to socialism, the *mithaq*, in 1962. Worker participation was part of a larger reform package (nationalisation, free education, job security, etc.), seeking to integrate capital, labour and the state in order to achieve industrial peace and high productivity, and to forge social unity to secure national integration (Bayat 1991, 130ff). Worker participation consisted of

board representation (out of nine board members, four were elected by the workers), joint labour–management production committees, personnel committees and other committees, allowing all elected workers company-paid access to education and training. By 1966 more than 400 public enterprises had introduced these participation schemes (ILO 1981, 121).

Bayat tried to trace the possible ideological origins of participation in Egypt but could not find any. Traditionally, Egypt is a hierarchical/bureaucratic society and the Free Officers who promulgated the *mithaq* had no clear idea about the future – except nationalism. There was no ideological concern for industrial democracy. Quoting Aulas, Bayat suggests that workers' participation and, in general, 'Arab Socialism' was prompted by Egypt's alliance with the USSR, adopting a non-capitalist path of development as prescribed by USSR for its allies. Thus participation was politically convenient and offered managerial advantages in the public sector firms (productivity and industrial peace) (Bayat 1991, 139–40). For one thing, it allowed the Free Officers to liberate themselves from the trade unions which were relatively strong and independent. The trade unions were now incorporated into the state (Bianchi 1986), and the promises surrounding participation (workers to become masters of their own enterprises) remained rhetoric, as the workplaces remained as authoritarian as before with one difference: the elected worker representatives became an additional stratum in the bureaucracy (El-Sayed 1978). A later evaluation, in the late 1980s, suggests that, in practice, worker participation in Egypt was a mere formality (Bayat 1991, 151).

Perhaps the best-known case of African participation experience is the one of Tanzania. Its Arusha Declaration of 1967 drew worldwide attention. It stressed, among other things, that bringing the means of production under state control was not a sufficient condition for a country to be on the road to socialism. A further crucial step consisted of turning the state-owned means of production to the control of the peasants and the workers, thus democratising the economy. It was the combination of nationalisation and democracy that should constitute the basis of building *ujamaa* [self-reliance] (Bavu et al. 1981, 277). The Arusha Declaration was followed up by practical measures: the larger part of the economy was transformed into parastatal enterprises and a presidential circular was issued for the creation of works councils and other forms of worker participation in public and state firms and in government ministries. The aim was 'to give more responsibility to the workers. This in turn would enhance industrial discipline when the workers understood what they were doing and why they were doing it, as fully respected workers. This would enhance their creativeness and enthusiasm' (Clause 1 of presidential circular 1 1970, as quoted in Bavu et al. 1981, 278). In 1971 the single party, TANU, issued the famous *Mwongozo*, the party guidelines, which asserted the workers' and peasants' rights to control.

The main emphasis was placed on self-management forms in communes: the *ujamaa* villages (see Mihyo 1992b for an overview). In the parastatal enterprises the general manager was appointed by the President, one worker representative on the board of directors was appointed by the trade union. A workers' council was composed, as specified in the presidential circular, as follows: the chairman of the TANU branch, the managing director of the enterprise, all heads of department, the

members of the workers' committee (the trade union committee of the firm), and elected worker representatives. The competence of the councils was not clearly defined but could extend to cover production and planning as well as questions directly relevant to workers such as welfare and wages. The workers' councils had an executive committee (mainly consisting of managers) which had to execute the council's decisions. By 1975 142 public sector organisations operated with a participative system (Prasnikar 1991, 81). By 1976 there were 8,000 *ujamaa* villages, extending to 85 per cent of the population (ILO 1981, 67).

According to Mihyo, the only real workers' control in Tanzania was manifested in factory occupations and work-ins, when workers took inspiration in the *Mwongozo* statements and asserted themselves through action protest. Where workers met gross injustice, were discriminated against or became victim of incompetent management, they formed committees or even wanted to take over the running of these enterprises, making reference to the *Mwongozo* slogans. But these protests failed, as they were supported by neither party nor trade unions (Mihyo 1983, 105–19).

The other forms of participation, instituted through the presidential circular, board representation and workers' councils, turned out to be a deception for workers. In the formally instituted forms of participation, the managers and technocrats always dominated the meetings and workers were not given sufficient education to enable them to participate effectively in decision making, they had neither autonomy nor power (Mihyo 1975, 71–3), and the exercise turned out to be a new technique of worker manipulation (Mapolu 1976, 209). Two case studies carried out in the 1970s (in the National Bank of Commerce and the Urafiki Textile Mill) suggest that the works councils were mainly consultative (ICPE 1981). Other studies depicted a gloomy picture of the practical experience with the workers' councils, which fell far below expectations of workers who had become fairly militant in view of the bold language of the Arusha Declaration. In the process, workers had lost their independent trade unions which were now integrated into the party and operated as workers' committees which were, according to Mapolu, mainly concerned by welfare questions and tended to be instruments of employers for keeping the workers down (Mapolu 1976, 205). The government had reorganised the trade union movement to give it a place in the political and economic structure of the country. It demanded that the unions should propagate the political ideas of the party and balance the demands of workers with national policy (Bavu 1981, 275–6). Being under party control, the trade union leadership eventually became alienated from the workers, and it took a long 'bottom-up' process to finally restore internal trade union democracy some two decades later (Chambua 1997; Chambua 2002). In Chapter 8 a more detailed description will be given of later and recent experience in Tanzania.

Zambia's introduction of worker participation was also part of a wider vision that political independence should be followed by economic independence and that, to achieve this, Zambians should 'become masters of their own destiny', and should 'transform capital-controlled enterprises in the hands of a few towards ultimately worker self-managed firms' (Fincham and Zulu 1980). An important milestone was the Livingstone Labour Conference of 1967 which proposed a New Deal in industry based on the principles of humanism (Kalombo 1985, 258). President Kaunda launched a worker participation programme with the aim of bringing about

humanisation of work, giving more power to workers as well as a more equitable distribution of income and increase in production. A lengthy and wide social dialogue followed which included trade unions, the employer organisation and experts of the ILO. The initial response of the trade unions was positive but they wanted more power for the workers than stipulated in the draft works council's provisions. There was fierce resistance from the employers' federation which rejected the same draft provisions. The Industrial Relations Act was implemented in 1976, and provided for the setting up of workers' councils (consisting of a two-thirds majority of elected worker representatives) in all firms (private and public) with over 100 employees. The competence of the councils consisted mainly of rights of information and consultation, but also included the right of veto concerning the hiring of workers, their wages, their transfer and their discipline (the official structure is extensively reported in Kalombo 1985, 294–309). The Act, which had sought to reconcile the interests of labour and capital, was no longer an instrument to implement a policy of change as originally intended, but an ugly compromise and no more than a package of tranquillisers for industrial conflict, leaving the power of employers untouched (Kester 1984, 84).

Case studies show that the Councils were consultative only (ICPE 1983; ICPE 1983b; ICPE 1983c) and no cases are known where use was made of the veto right.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Tanzania, the sole party in Zambia (UNIP) did not succeed in integrating the trade union movement into its ranks. The ZCTU was organised in workers' committees within enterprises and, to the regret of the Party, these operated side by side with the workers' councils. The ZCTU demanded first a clear demarcation line between the operational domains of trade union activity and the workers' councils. In an attempt to win the trade union over, the Central Committee of the Party decided in 1983 that five members of the trade union should sit on the board of the Zambia Industrial and Mining Corporation (the key company of Zambia's economy), but on condition that whoever was appointed by the ZCTU must be a member of the Party (Kalombo 1985, 309). The ZCTU did not accept, stating that loyalty to or membership of the Party was irrelevant to participation on the board. Rather, the ZCTU was resolved to choose people with ability, capable of delivering the goods (*ibid.*, 317). The confrontation between UNIP and ZCTU culminated in the presidential election in the early 1990s, when the ZCTU leader, Frederic Chiluba, defeated Kenneth Kaunda (see also Chapter 8).

A later experience with intended 'transformative worker participation' occurred in Mozambique where, upon independence in 1974, like in Algeria, the Portuguese colonisers had left the country abruptly. FRELIMO launched a strategy of revolutionary socialist construction, advocating (among other things) democratic worker control. FRELIMO instituted 'dynamising groups' which were to mobilise the population for the revolution and 'production councils' of workers which were to have complete responsibility for their plants. But soon, state-appointed managers established authoritarian one-man management systems. The production councils were reduced to organs with a 'police role against indiscipline, laziness

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5 See Chapter 8 for a further description of the Zambian experience in the 1970s and early 1980s.

and absenteeism' (Sketchley 1985, quoted in Bayat 1991, 100). Later, party cells replaced the dynamising groups and begun to check the activities of the workers and of the administrators. And under initiative of the party, trade unions were set up (no indigenous trade unions had existed before independence), and the production councils became *de facto* trade union committees.<sup>6</sup> Quoting studies of Sketchley (1985) and Munslow (1983), Bayat reports that the production councils did to an extent democratise the workplace, but the top-down control by the party and the state remained the main characteristic of the management of the enterprises (see also Hansen 1997). Several researchers and analysts, full of sympathy with Mozambique and its revolution, eventually pointed at the failure of worker participation (Saul 1985; Sketchley 1985; Munslow 1983): 'the biggest factory in Maputo, General Tire, is like a well-run capitalist factory anywhere in the world' (Hanlon 1984, 178).<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Zimbabwe too introduced worker participation with a mobilising agenda, as part of the plans for political and economic change contemplated by ZANU politicians before independence. Upon independence, guidelines were issued, spelling out structure and power of workers' committees as well as a model constitution for a works council, and the political discourse in the early 1980s dressed these committees and councils up with the perspective of 'transformation' to workers' self-management and workers' control (Schiphorst 2001, 187–200). During the same period, the ZANU government tried to gain control over the trade union movement and, as in Zambia, when this remained a tougher task than expected, the workers' committees were given powers surpassing those of the unions, even in the traditional areas of trade union activity (*ibid.*, 231). In practice, the committees and councils were beset by many problems and a number of independent studies concluded that there was no sign of transformation whatsoever and that, rather, the committees and councils were eroding the worker class struggle (studies of, amongst others, Nangati, Loewenson, Ngirandi and Makanya, quoted by Schiphorst 2001, 337–8). Eventually, a development similar to that in Zambia took place: the trade union became the main agitator against the one-party regime of Mugabe, and here again the trade union leader became the contestant of Mugabe. The experience of Zimbabwe will be extensively reported in Chapter 8. In the meantime, Box 2.2 introduces some of the useful sources of information available for the areas covered above and below.

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6 The fascinating account by the first trade union leaders on how trade unionism emerged from the production committees and the dynamising groups may be read in Hansen (1997).

7 The references to the studies of Sketchley, Munslow, Saul and Hanlon are quoted from Bayat (1991) for his analysis.

**Box 2.2 Further reading on experiences with worker participation in Africa**

There is a considerable amount of literature on worker participation in Africa, on its first post-independence experience when the phenomenon was new and looked promising. A major project of comparative research in Africa as well as in other Third World countries was conducted by the International Centre for Public Enterprises in Developing Countries (ICPE), which resulted in six voluminous publications (between 1980 and 1985 – see Bibliography), providing information on participation in Algeria, Libya, Tanzania, Zambia, Congo and Nigeria and some ten other countries in Asia and Latin America. Another comparative publication is a book by ILO with a worldwide coverage (*Workers' Participation in Decisions in Undertakings*, 1981), providing information on Algeria, Burundi, Gabon, Tunisia, Mauritania, Zaire, Tanzania, Madagascar, Libya, Benin, Congo, Mali, Egypt and Mozambique.

The ILO book provides information on the formal structures of participation in the countries mentioned in a telephone-directory fashion: it is all purely descriptive, yet very informative. The ICPE volumes are a stunning compilation of description, empirical scientific studies and outright political propaganda. The project (officially labelled 'international comparative research on workers' self-management and participation in decision making as a factor of social change and economic progress in developing countries') was launched at the 4th Conference of the Heads of States and Governments of Non-Aligned Countries, in Algiers in September 1973. Yugoslavia, as one of the main leaders of the non-aligned movement and proud of its worker self-management achievements, initiated the project and organised the discussion of the results at scientific and political forums in various countries. The most valuable readings are the ones on Zambia (ICPE 1983a; ICPE 1983c; ICPE 1985) as little publication exists on that experience – even if several of the texts are written by 'party boys': they help to understand the spirit and approach of the political agents of that time. The texts on Tanzania largely overlap with other, better publications by the same authors. The special feature of the ICPE Algerian studies is that their publication needed prior written approval of the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs! The contributions on Libya, Congo and Nigeria are brief and descriptive.

Among studies on country experiences are the books by Clegg (1971) and Boussoumah (1982) on Algeria, El-Sayed (1978) on Egypt and Mapolu (1976) and Mihyo (1983) on Tanzania (see Bibliography at the end of this book).

*Experiences in other African countries*

The countries briefly reviewed above were perhaps the more well-known cases of worker participation in Africa. There were more countries about whom, however, only limited information appears to be available. Worker participation in Congo was called the Principle of the Determinant Trilogy of the 'three co's': co-determination, co-decision and co-responsibility, for any decision about the good running of a public enterprise and the public service. This policy was introduced 'by the President of the Republic and the President of the State Council, considering resolutions of the Congo Federation of Trade Unions, and hearing the Politbureau' (Awola 1983, 112). The main participation institutions were a management committee, an equality committee of recruitment and promotion, a permanent production committee, a

production control committee and a tribunal of comrades. In all of these, most or all members were party or trade union nominated, the trade union being an extension of the party. The chances of democratic performance may be assessed by looking closer at the tribunal of comrades. It consists of party members, managers and elected members of the trade union bureau. Its competence was to 'resolve the problems relevant to the development of production, bad timekeeping (inaccuracy), characteristic laziness, slowing down of production, deterioration of the materials of production and the relationship between the workers and the management, as well as problems related to the reinforcement of discipline at work' (*ibid.*, 119). A more conspicuous adulteration of principles of democratic participation could hardly be imagined!

Revolutionary parties introduced worker participation more often, as in Benin where, after a series of nationalisations, worker representation was introduced on the boards of directors of companies entirely or publicly owned by the state. In 1976 five worker representatives sat on these boards on a total of up to 15 members (ILO 1981, 120). The sting of the scheme, like in Congo, was to be found in party control. The board also included a representative of the National Revolutionary Council, and an active role was played by the Committee for the Defence of the Achievements of the Revolution, elected by workers and with the task to make suggestions on the running and the sound management of the undertaking (*ibid.*, 120–1).

Many African countries had far more marginal forms of worker participation, either in a free market economy or in one-party or no-party states. In Nigeria, for instance, the emphasis was on collective bargaining in private enterprises, but joint negotiation councils existed in the civil service and joint consultative committees also existed (Olaifa 1983, 164–6). Likewise, consultative institutions existed in Mauritius (Gujadhur et al. 1983), in Burundi, Gabon, Mauritania, Tunisia and Zaire (ILO 1981) and presumably in many other countries. In these countries the approach was 'corporative' (Bayat 1991, 27): peaceful co-operation between the state, capital and labour. It implied a status quo of fundamental power structures, within which more worker involvement and influence was allowed to the extent the three traditional partners would agree, 'to secure the mutual co-operation of employers and employees in achieving industrial peace, greater efficiency and productivity in the interest of the enterprise, the workers, the consumers and the nation' (ILO 1981, 10).

In other countries, worker participation was introduced from above by soldier politicians, to mobilise worker support to their regimes. In Sudan the Nimeri regime introduced worker participation on the boards of directors in public enterprises (Musa 1997) and, in Ghana, the Rawlings regime ordered the formation of workers' defence committees immediately after the coup d'état in the early 1980s (Agbesinyale 2000a). Experience in Ghana will be reported in Chapter 7.

*Responsible participation* A special feature encountered in French-speaking countries was that of 'responsible participation', a vague notion referring to mostly non-institutionalised consultation procedures whereby the trade unions in particular were consulted, at enterprise but very markedly also at national level. Trade union places were reserved in the different national commissions where the social and

economic policies of the country were formulated, and trade unions were invited as regular partners on political platforms, and had access various organs of the ruling political party (Bagayogo 1982, 12). Yet this participation was not regulated by sets of rights and duties in most cases, and was supposed to be 'responsible', that is, taking the social and economic interests of the country into account. The phenomenon was interpreted differently per country, also in terms of the degree of dependence or independence of the trade unions vis-à-vis the political party or regime in power. Perhaps the best way of interpreting responsible participation is in terms of the craftsmanship of trade unionists to create margins of influence and defend worker interests in the political game of the government, to listen to important social forces in the country and to come to deals with them, whilst putting emphasis on 'responsible': in the end government was *the* representative of the general interest, so that responsible participation was bound to be manipulative. Nevertheless, trade unions were sometimes able to influence decisions effectively. In Mali they were the main initiator of decisions by the socio-economic council under the Traoré regime (Sidibé et al. 1994, Chapter 2), and were allowed as representatives at the enterprise level (Dicko et al. 1985). In Togo the trade unions used the general framework of responsible participation to set up successful consumer co-operatives and trade union education centres in all main districts of the country (Barnabo 1981). In Senegal the trade union federation, UNTS, became an important partner in the political policy debate but also in its execution: two government ministries were led by trade unionists (Lô 1988). The experience of the francophone countries Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali will be discussed in Chapter 7.

### **The State of the Art: An Interim Evaluation**

The review of African experience so far has covered the period between political independence until roughly the early 1990s when, as observed in the first chapter of this book, labour relations in Africa underwent a radical change. Box 2.3 introduces a few of the major studies that will help readers in the analysis of this process. The period from 1990 onward will be described and analysed in later chapters of this book.<sup>8</sup>

The post-independence nationalist movements in Africa had the opportunity to create a new political, social and economic order, which also created important possibilities for changes in labour relations. Indeed, ambitious projects were launched, sometimes aiming at complete de-centralised self-management like in Algeria, transformation to 'Arab' socialism as in Egypt, or 'African' socialism as in Tanzania, Zambia, and so on. In many other countries at least some form of worker participation was introduced, formalised or not, in order to mobilise the population for development. In the countries introducing transformative participation this was seen as part of a broader overall strategy for change and development and no doubt inspired by a genuine desire for self-reliance and self-determination. Worker

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8 The year 1990 is only a rough reference to the beginning of large-scale political democratisation in Africa. Some trends and developments within the dogmatic unitary political framework (see Chapter 1) continued in a number of countries well into the 1990s, whereas the liberal pluralist political framework started before the 1990s in other countries.



participation was expected to create democratic practices and institutions in the overall process of socio-economic development.

Generally speaking, these transition strategies have failed, being primarily an element in a process of decolonisation and nationalisation, and of expansion and simultaneously transformation of the public sector. Participation then meant obtaining support for the country's development policies and promoting working-class emancipation: it was both an end and a means in itself. The objectives, as officially stated by the political forces initiating and supporting the transition, have therefore to be carefully scrutinised. Objectives formulated for the short or medium run were only realisable in the long term. This meant that the gap between rhetoric and concrete achievement often widened. A critical analysis brings to light specific economic, political and sociological factors which have appeared problems of implementation.

In terms of economic feasibility, emphasis was laid on provision of capital, but access to markets and technology and availability of know-how appeared to pose insurmountable problems. The dependent position in the international economic order has imposed a major constraint. It appeared an unattainable task for any Third World country to achieve a form of economic development tuned to its own needs. A major factor in this respect is the existence of international linkages and pressures on the domestic economies. In the production structures international interests can be strongly represented either by the presence of multinational companies, or joint ventures in which the national interests have only a limited degree of control. In the public sector, the great danger appeared that steps of transition were taken at a time when public enterprises performed – already – inefficiently. Workers' participation was then introduced as a substitute for the necessary economic measures.

Governments have played a strong initiating role in labour relations, not only as supervisors of labour and labour relations but also as major employers. Lofty philosophical and ideological objectives loom large in official development planning documents. The emphasis is on 'creating a new socio-economic order', often socialist in character. Worker participation was seen as a means to humanise workplace relations (emphasis in Tanzania and Zambia), giving power to workers (emphasis in Algeria and Mozambique), equitable distribution of income (emphasis in Zimbabwe) and increased productivity and efficiency (emphasis in all countries, also those introducing 'integrative' participation). Workers' participation was often unilaterally set in motion 'from above', by a single political party under charismatic leadership. A number of tensions thus emerged. Participation was initiated and supported by the government not only as a goal in itself but also as an important instrument to mobilise workers and to legitimate other structural changes. Above all it was considered instrumental in generating a stable and co-operative response from labour. For instance, in Tanzania policy formulation was kept fairly strictly within the single-party framework. Any contribution by intellectuals came from within the party and was not allowed to conflict with the party line. But, as reported above, when workers took over the management of a failing enterprise and wanted to run it under conditions of self-management, they only encountered resistance from government and party. A policy which was announced to increase the influence of the grass roots, remained controlled 'from above'.

**Box 2.3 Studies evaluating the ‘third way’ in Africa and elsewhere**

Several books have addressed the evaluation of (in particular) the transformative participation experiences in Third World countries; the studies are cross-continental. A commendable reading is the book by Assef Bayat, an Iranian sociologist who lived through the experience of the popular uprisings in Iran in which the *shuras* [workers’ committees] were instrumental in the overthrow of the Shah. He wrote a book about it and later, at the American University in Cairo he wrote *Work, Politics and Power* (Bayat 1991), which is a comparative account of experience with worker participation and self-management all over the world. For Africa the book is of particular value as experiences in many African countries feature prominently in the analysis, and also because Bayat takes the broad and the long view. In addition, the African experience can be compared to those in Asia, Latin America and Europe as Bayat uses a well-designed theoretical framework. Also in the present chapter, ample use was made of Bayat’s study.

Another study in which African experience is compared with those in other parts of the world is the book by Prasnikar, *Workers’ Participation and Self-Management in Developing Countries*, which pulls together the salient points of the ICPE studies mentioned in Box 2.2 (Prasnikar 1991).

Two books, though not on Africa, may interest African readers as they are excellent analyses of ‘transformative participation’ elsewhere in the Third World. *The Politics of Workers’ Participation: The Peruvian Approach in Comparative Perspective* by Evelyne Stephens is a study in comparative politics, putting the Peruvian experience in the wider perspective of Third World countries under the differing politico-economic systems; these have far-reaching effects on the purpose and design of participation, on its results, and on its supportive policies (Stephens 1980). The work by Espinosa and Zimbalist, *Economic Democracy: Workers’ Participation in Chilean Industry 1970–1973*, describes how in Chile under the Allende regime attempts were made to achieve industrial democracy under the existing constitutional framework. The study shows that historic change is open to human action and to aspirations for freedom, self-determination and self-realisation. The authors also make an important contribution to general participation theory by showing that participation at higher levels within the enterprise are more effective when accompanied by active participation at the base, especially through workers’ assemblies at the shop floor and general assemblies of the whole enterprise (Espinosa and Zimbalist 1978).

Full bibliographic details of the works mentioned may be found in the Bibliography at the end of this book.

A most conspicuous trend was that the participatory process was assimilated more and more into the state apparatus and became subject to ‘goal deformation’ (Kester 1980, 213). The civil servants who had to design the participation structures mostly belonged to the middle and upper classes of society, a position entailing an attachment to traditional attitudes in respect to the role of workers and managers. The prime concerns of government officials at the top level are frequently ones of economic efficiency, productivity and growth rates, and not participation of workers. In giving actual shape to participation, the emphasis tended to fall on harmony and productivity; objectives such as power distribution and humanisation were in practice given much less emphasis than managerial ones. In a number of ‘mobilising’ regimes

the real objectives of the political leaders was left beyond doubt: they instituted 'productivity committees' under control of trade unions which in turn were under tutelage of the single political party – described as a 'double downward control' of participation (Bernstein 1976), as was demonstrated in the Mozambique case mentioned above.

In many African countries, no legal framework was created to regulate competence and procedure of participation, or to protect the participators. Where legislation was introduced, the formal power of participation lagged far behind the stated objectives (for instance in Zambia). In countries with no legal provisions to rely on, participation was based on trust and therefore highly vulnerable to manipulation by employers, government and party.

The trade union response to these developments has often been puzzling. Generalisations are difficult but, with a few exceptions, unions have proved insufficiently equipped for the role of a vigorous partner in economic and social development – they have not had the structure, knowledge and experience. Following the introduction of participation, many unions came out in favour, in principle. They saw the need to mobilise human and material resources in a development process which promised a more equitable social order. However, the unions did not get the opportunity, or failed to take the initiative, in shaping participation for both national development and improvement of the social, economic and political position of workers and those similarly deprived in society.

The introduction of worker participation has thrown some unions into considerable disarray. In Mali and Togo, unions managed to take the initiative when participation was first introduced but were found wanting when sustained support and a grasp of the dynamics of the policy was needed. Other trade unions, as in Zambia, have distanced themselves from participation and clung to the traditional practice of collective bargaining, thus limiting worker influence to wages and working conditions and opposing management decisions. This left issues such as the control of capital, control of the production process and so on intact and undisputed. Between these extremes are trade unions in, for example, Algeria and Tanzania, who did not themselves initiate the process but were moulded by the single party and the government under its control to become supporters of participation, thus losing their independent role as defenders of the workers' interests. Indeed, in many African countries, independent trade unions were integrated into revolutionary, transformative, progressive or nationalist regimes, and were made co-responsible for the achievement of party objectives. As stated earlier, the situation was often perplexing, as the formal structures and competences, which otherwise differed very considerably from country to country, could hide the struggle within trade union structures to represent the interests of the workers within and sometimes outside the margins of freedom left by the party: However, somewhere, somehow, democratic pressures from below did continue (Sidibé and Venturi 1997).

## Chapter 3

# A Theory of the Dynamics of Workplace Democracy

This book is about the democratisation of labour relations in Africa. It was recalled in the first two chapters how Africa moved from dogmatic party or military controlled labour relations and trade unionism, to a context of a multi-party liberal market economy in which the labour relations actors had to redefine their positions and policies. This process may best be captured under the notion of ‘democratisation of labour relations’, a process that has only begun and that presents formidable challenges, in particular to the trade union movement and to the workers in general.

The research of the African Workers’ Participation Development Programme (APADEP) on which this book reports is about that democratisation process. In the course of that research a number of efforts were made to understand ‘democratisation of labour relations’ conceptually and theoretically. This was done in two ways: building on existing theory as well as making reference to the actual research opportunities under the APADEP research projects conducted between 1982 and 2003 (see Chapter 4).

APADEP workplace democracy research initially focused only on specific worker participation schemes, but eventually a much wider perspective was adopted. First, this was done because formalised forms of worker participation did not (or do no longer) exist in most of the countries where research was conducted. Secondly, it was done because the struggle for democracy was waged in many other ways: as an extension of existing trade union structures and procedures, in negotiations at enterprise and national level, in alliances with NGOs, etc. Thus, rather than concentrating strictly on formalised ‘worker participation’, research encompassed worker as well as trade union participation in decision making at workplace level and beyond.

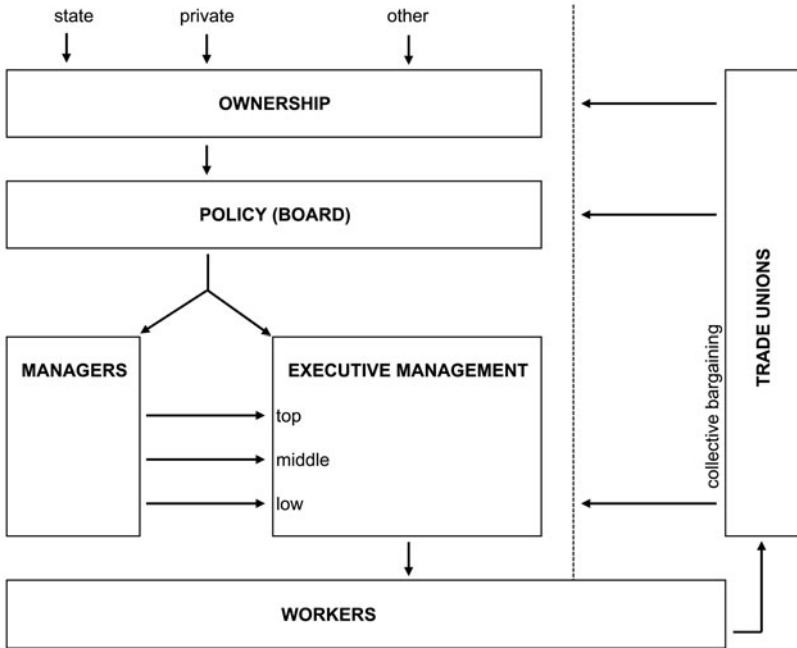
### **On the Concept of Worker Participation**

For many, participation is a misty concept. That is not surprising as participation means different things to different people, in different contexts, at different times, and indeed thousands of pages to conceptualise worker participation have been written by sociologists, economists, political scientists, law experts and management specialists.<sup>1</sup> Appreciation of the many dimensions of worker participation demands

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1 The *Concise Encyclopaedia of Participation and Co-Management* (1992) contains almost 1,000 pages. In the *Reader’s Guide to the Social Sciences* (2001) there are 15 different essays on worker participation, under economics, sociology, political science and management studies.

conceptual clarification and insights in past and current theory, and this chapter will attempt to bring the major concepts and definitions and their elaboration together.



**Figure 3.1 Summary sketch of a typical capital-controlled work organisation**

*Non-participation*

It is helpful to briefly sketch the major characteristics of a non-participatory workplace before setting out to elaborate the notion of workplace participation. Figure 3.1 presents a summary and simplified sketch of a typical non-participatory firm. Ownership is the origin of the power structure, whether the firm is private or public. The owner(s) (private shareholders, the state or any other configuration) have the exclusive and ultimate right of appropriation and control. Normally they appoint a board (a board of directors, supervisory board or whatever other name may be given) which formulates company policy and supervises management. Managers at various levels execute the policy laid down by the board, and even where management makes policy itself this does not affect the basic principle of the power structure: ultimately, power will refer back to the board, and in the end to the owners. Workers are at the bottom of the power structure and do not take part in decision making at management, board or owners' level. This does not mean that workers may not have influence. Even though they have no say whatsoever over the running of the company, they may negotiate terms of employment or conditions of work, normally through their trade union. This influence is, however, *not exerted*

through taking part in the internal decision-making structure of the enterprise but through a process of collective bargaining or ultimately through industrial action, including strikes. However successful this influence may be, it does not penetrate the internal decision-making structure of the company. It remains as an influence from outside, from a position of opposition, and is often referred to as *adversarial labour relations*.

### Participation

*Participatory labour relations* are distinct from adversarial ones in that they imply a penetration of the workers and or their representatives into the internal decision-making structure of a workplace. The basic notion of worker participation is that workers, directly or through representatives, take part in decision making that affects their working life, on the shop floor, at their workplace, in the enterprise, but also at other levels of decision making (for example, local, regional, national and international). 'Taking part in decisions' is a broad concept that can refer to different degrees (information, consultation, co-decision, self-management), different objectives (better human relations, more equity in incomes, higher productivity, more power, etc.), with respect to different subjects (from decisions on welfare, to organisation, to strategic economic decisions), different forms (from suggestion box to self-management), different status (from informal to statutory or legal), and so on. These notions will be elaborated later in this chapter.

The notion of participation refers usually to 'access to decisions', in other words to *power sharing*, but also to *sharing in the distribution of profits* and *sharing in ownership itself*. Participation of workers in decision making is often referred to as *industrial democracy*, and participation of workers in the fruits of ownership and in ownership itself as *economic democracy*, whereas *workers' self-management* may be seen as a combination of the first two.

### Participation in decision making

Most commonly, participation is understood to mean that workers share in one or more, eventually all, decisions that are made at the level of the enterprise, and beyond. If they do so collectively it is called *direct participation*; if they do so via representatives this is referred to as *indirect participation*.

At the workplace, two distinct major types of participation in decision making should be distinguished. One is where workers or their representatives have a *share in the executive management* of their workplace. In this type of participation, basically, workers share decision making on the (day-to-day) running of the place with supervisory staff or managers. This type of participation is also often referred to as *organisational participation*. A second type, usually of 'indirect' participation, is where representatives of workers have a *share in the policy making or policy control* over their workplace. In this case workers share decision making on company policy with representatives of the owners (private capital, state ownership or other types of ownership).

*Economic democracy: participation in income and ownership*

Worker participation can also refer to *sharing in capital ownership* (worker shareholding schemes of whatever nature) or *sharing in capital income*, most often bonus or profit-sharing schemes. Economic democracy may exist by itself, without any form of participation in decision making.

*Workers' self-management*

The hierarchy of power in a traditional 'capitalist' or state-owned workplace originates from capital ownership: ownership yields the right of appropriation or allocation of the fruits of ownership to the owner(s), and it also yields them the right of policy making and of control of the execution of policy. In a workplace with worker participation in decision making and/or ownership, participation implies a modification of this power structure, which may range from a nominal to a very important modification. Workers' self-management is a fundamentally different structure. The decision-making process within the workplace, including policy making and policy control, is divorced from control by the owners of the capital. The owners of the capital receive a financial reward for making capital available, but they no longer enjoy the right of policy control, of control over executive management and of profit allocation: these rights are now fully and democratically exercised by the members of the workplace on a one-person-one-vote basis. In a self-managed firm the members of the firm collectively control the place of work, use the capital available, and decide on the use of income earned with that capital (see Vanek 1975, introductory chapter).

*Collective bargaining*

In some theoretical perceptions collective bargaining should not be counted among the range of participation institutions. As briefly set out a while earlier when discussing the non-participatory workplace, collective bargaining is a confrontation *from outside the internal decision-making structure* of a workplace. It is an instrument of confrontation, a procedure of *negotiation*, not a procedure for *joint decision making*. Collective bargaining is a procedure by which trade unions negotiate the terms of the employment contract of workers and a number of working conditions and, if need be, use industrial action (sometimes called industrial warfare!). Participation is a procedure by which workers or worker representatives take decisions, together with managers or directors, on the running of the workplace and may cover the entire spectrum of enterprise management and policy. Key words in the orientation of collective bargaining are *adversarialism*, *conflict*, *confrontation*, *strike*, etc., whereas for participation they are *partnership* and *co-operation*.

But both collective bargaining and participation are forms of worker representation and may complement each other. Collective bargaining is also a democratic institution to the extent that the rules of the game of negotiation (and of industrial action if negotiations fail) may be and often are democratically established and executed. Collective bargaining is, strictly speaking, not an institution of participation, unless

one were to agree with one author who baptised collective bargaining as '*antagonistic participation*' (Baglioni 1998). But currently collective bargaining is considered a typical exponent of *adversarial labour relations* rather than of *participatory labour relations*. In practice, however, the two procedures appear to be two ends of one continuum of obtaining worker influence, which may partly overlap or even roll into one. Collective bargaining may, in practice, entail a lot of participation in decision making, and participation may entail a lot of bargaining on the terms of employment. This has been brilliantly analysed by Strauss (1998), and will be amply demonstrated when presenting the research data on Africa.

### Major Objectives of Worker Participation

The first major objective is the *redistribution of power* in labour relations. Participation associates workers or, indirectly, worker representatives to decision making at various levels. The underlying objective is to generate and develop worker power, to achieve *participatory democracy*. The redistribution of power at the workplace is expected to lead to the development of democracy in general (as was argued by Pateman, 1970). Democracy in the workplace and in the economy is an important condition for the sustainability and deepening of political democracy and the development of a democratic culture.

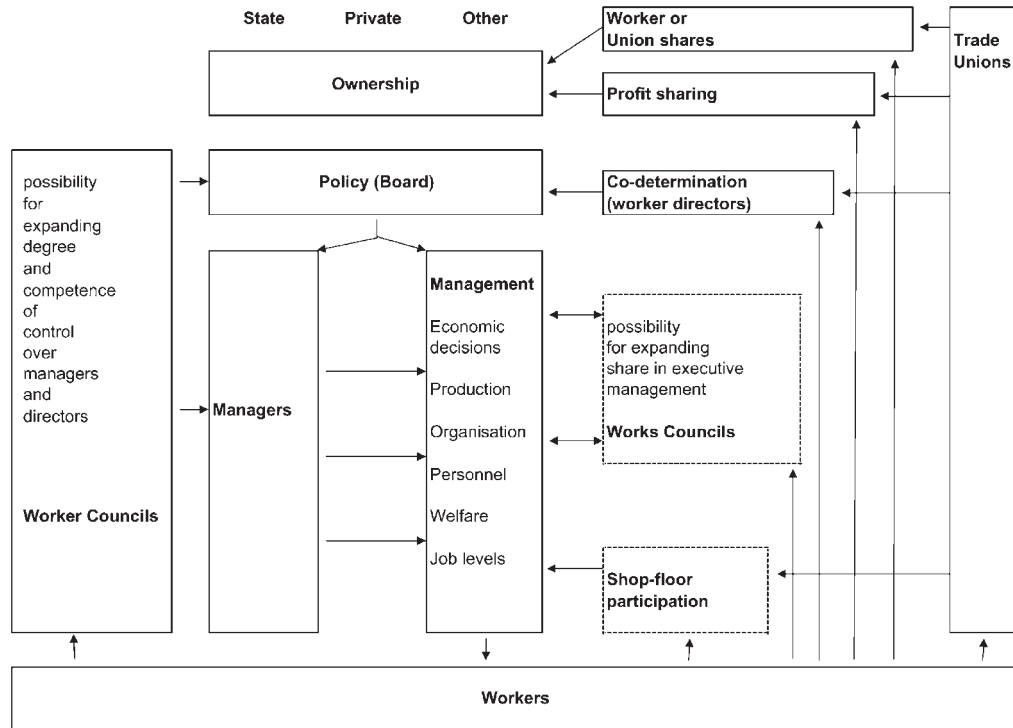
A second major objective is the *humanisation* of the social relations at the workplace between fellow workers, and between workers, supervisors and managers, and the humanisation of the nature of work itself. The underlying objective is to enhance the *self-respect and dignity* of the worker (see the classic Blauner study, 1964).

A third major objective is the *redistribution of income and employment*. Participation may give workers a share in the ownership and/or in the profits of a company or entitle them to share in other material benefits accruing from capital ownership. The underlying objective is that of *equity*, and is expected to contribute to higher levels of economic democracy.

A fourth major dimension of workplace participation is that of making *optimal use of human resources*, as participation unleashes the capacity and creativity of workers. The underlying objectives are *efficiency and productivity*. Involving workers in the running of their places of work is expected to provide a spur to higher and qualitatively better levels of production as it makes an appeal to the sense of responsibility of the workers (this aspect is elaborated in an overview of organisational participation by Heller et al. 1998).

Democratic participation is a *universal human right* and an expression of the integrity and dignity of each human being, according to the Universal Human Rights Declaration, the European Charter for Fundamental Rights and the African Charter for Popular Participation.





**Figure 3.2 Main forms of workers' participation**

## Main Different Forms of Workplace Participation

The three main types of workplace participation may be found in many different forms or structures. The most important of these will be briefly reviewed in the following sections. They are summarily sketched in Figure 3.2.

### *Shop-floor participation*

Procedures of participation may be introduced at the lowest level of decision making, when the members of a work unit can influence decisions on the running of their own shop floor, or run their shop floor themselves. Shop-floor participation is essentially 'direct participation': each worker has access to decisions, no representatives are elected or appointed. This can only apply to small, face-to-face groups of workers. There are many different forms of such direct participation: from 'participative management' which is a management style where opinions of workers are sought, to 'autonomous work groups' where the workers self-manage their own workshop without supervision. Also, the Japan-originated schemes such as quality circles are forms of shop-floor participation.

Shop-floor participation is mostly introduced by management or by trade union-management agreement. This form of participation can be important for both management and workers. For management, such participation may increase efficiency and productivity. Workers are able to influence decisions at their own job level as they are often the very experts on the types of problems that have to be solved. Their involvement may be expected to enhance job satisfaction which will, in turn, reduce absenteeism and increase production quantitatively and qualitatively, and may promote a climate of industrial peace. The advantage for the workers themselves is that they are better respected in their capacities, enjoy greater satisfaction in their immediate work environment and may feel less alienated.

This form of participation may function to the satisfaction of both workers and management, but may, and this is a major criticism of it, serve to integrate workers in a larger system of management and employer power. Contributions to productivity and efficiency raise questions of income distribution and profit allocation.

### *Works councils*

These are the most widespread form of workplace participation. Works councils are institutions which bring together representatives of workers and of managers to take part, jointly, in enterprise decision making. Other names are often used for the same type of institution; for instance, labour-management council, joint management council, joint consultative council, and so on. In this chapter the concept works council will be used to include similar institutions as just mentioned.

Works councils differ widely in terms of composition, structure, competence and power. Worker representatives may be elected by secret ballot from among the workers of the workplace concerned, they may be appointed by the trade union or even by management, 'the party' or government, and there may be combinations of different types of representation. In the composition of the council there may be a

minority, parity or majority worker representation. The competence of the council may be limited to dealing with welfare matters only or extend further and include personnel matters, production, or may extend to include major economic decisions. Worker power on the council may vary from only rights to information, all the way through to consultation, co-decision and veto-right. Works councils or similar institutions may be *statutory* – with a formal or legal structure – or *voluntary* – by agreement between labour and management but without formal or legal reference.

Works councils are often introduced at the initiative of government and are expected to achieve more harmony, industrial peace, better communication and a better flow of communication; in short, more co-operation between workers and management on matters which are found important by both. Works councils are often accepted by trade unions and workers since both expect that through the councils a platform for information and consultation is created which may be useful for all parties. Also, managers or employers sometimes introduce works councils in enterprises where no trade unions exist – or precisely to obstruct or prevent trade union presence.

#### *Casual participation*

The *suggestion box* should also be mentioned under labour–management consultation: through this device employees may submit written opinions or suggestions. In many cases management can do what it wants with the written submissions, but procedures may exist for review of the suggestions and complaints and their follow-up. The most formal regulation is the *suggestion box committee*.

#### *Workers' councils (as distinct from works councils)*

By and large, works councils as joint labour–management institutions have not been very satisfactory (ILO 1981). One major problem of the works councils was the joint presence of workers and managers in joint decision making, but often with (very) limited power on the part of workers. Even if worker power was formally important (by statute or law), worker representatives lacked the required competence to take part on equal basis in the decision-making process. The higher the level of executive management, the more training and experience is required, and the more easily the worker representatives can be misled, discouraged or indeed manipulated. The major debate on this dilemma (especially in Western Europe) has led to the conclusion that participation in executive management is only of interest for workers to the extent that executive managers are made accountable to workers for the consequences of decision making for labour.

Workers' councils consist of only worker representatives (or include also employer and management representatives but in *ex officio* non-voting roles). *Workers' councils do not so much deal with executive management, but rather exert control on the policy of the workplace.* The essence of this form of participation is that managers are no longer responsible to only the board of directors for the way they execute policy, but also to representatives of workers. Here again, structure, competence and power of workers' councils differ widely. As long as workers'

councils have only an advisory voice they may remain silent 'shadow boards of directors'. Yet they may put pressure on managers and on the board, and on public opinion as well. But the power of workers' councils may be greater, for instance, if their explicit approval is necessary to implement certain decisions or if they have the right to veto certain decisions. In countries with more powerful workers' councils these were often established through pressure by trade unions and/or (mostly leftist) governments seeking a more effective participation policy. The power of workers' councils can also be 'complete', as is the case under pure self-management where the workers' council is comparable to a board of directors in a private company, as will be explained in a later section on self-management.

*Participation on the board of directors ('co-determination')*

Worker representatives may also gain access to policy decision making on boards of directors (which may be called supervisory boards or have other names in different countries). Participation of workers at this level is expected to ensure that the representatives of the capital owners (the traditional board members appointed by the assembly of shareholders or by the private owner) are made (more) aware of the interests of workers so that company policy is based on social as well as commercial considerations.

Worker representatives on the board are usually called worker directors. Here again, composition, structure, competence and power of board representation differ, even if, typically, such representation is restricted to only one or two worker directors, which does not lead to a fundamental shift in the balance of power between labour and capital. In many Third World countries such minority board representation was introduced in public enterprises and worker representatives were more often appointed by government or party-controlled trade unions than directly elected by and from the workers themselves.

The most prominent international reference for worker participation on supervisory boards is 'co-determination' in Germany, which is an interlocking system of worker representation comprising the works council, a 'labour director' and parity worker representation on the supervisory board.<sup>2</sup> This co-determination was restricted to only one sector of Germany's industry (coal, iron, steel and mining) and in other sectors worker directors remained in minority position. The success

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2 The German Co-Determination Act provides for parity representation of workers and shareholders in the coal, iron, steel and mining industry. On a supervisory board of 11 members, 5 represent labour: one manual and one non-manual worker are appointed by the Works Council, and 3 members are appointed by the trade union. Five members are appointed by the shareholders' meeting. The 10 members together co-opt an independent chairperson of the board. The worker members on the board exercise the same power as the other members appointed by the private owners. All members have the right of access to all records, to decide on company policy, to appoint the top managers and to supervise the correct implementation of established policies. Among the top managers appointed by the board, the labour director cannot be appointed against the will of the worker representatives on the board. The labour director handles all personnel questions, but takes a full part in all other top executive management decisions as well.

of the fully fledged co-determination experience was such that a long protracted political battle was waged in Germany to apply full co-determination to all sectors, an effort which eventually failed. A long battle was also waged in the European Union to make worker board representation mandatory for all member states but, unlike the case of European Works Councils, the so-called Vredeling Directive did not make it (see Goetschy 2003).

*Worker participation in profits and in ownership*

Profit-sharing schemes are meant to give workers a share in the net profit of the company they work in, either as a cash payment over and above the regular wage or salary, or in the form of shares in the company. This is a form of *economic democracy*: workers receive a reward for the success of the company to which they have contributed. The objective is more justice in income distribution. Profit sharing can be an incentive for those who benefit from it, and indeed employers expect that the schemes will lead to greater motivation and efficiency. And in case profit shared is paid in the form of company shares, it is expected that workers have a greater feeling of belonging to the company and that this could increase their responsibility and loyalty to the company.

In practice, profit sharing may be full of pitfalls. What constitutes a profit? Can workers or their representatives inspect the financial situation of a company and the way profit is calculated? What is the relative contribution of each of the members of a company to productivity? What happens if the company makes losses and the workers are used to receiving shares in profit, especially as bonuses are quickly regarded as part of the regular salary? Profit sharing, if differentiated per category of workers, may break the unity of workers and may be deliberately used by employers to come to financial terms with workers directly, to divide the workers into distinct categories and to marginalise the trade unions.

In spite of these possible problems, there is an upsurge in financial participation in the world today. A major spur to financial participation was given by the Thatcher administration in the UK in the 1980s, ushering in 'popular capitalism' as part of neo-liberal policies. After some hesitations, a number of EU governments followed suit (Vaughan-Whitehead 1996) and conspicuously also, many Central and Eastern 'transitional' economies adopted financial participation as one of the top priorities in labour relations policy (Vaughan-Whitehead 2003).

Worker participation in ownership is introduced when owners offer shares to workers (sometimes as part of a profit-sharing scheme as explained above), or when trade unions buy shares on the market. This may be done on purely economic grounds: share owners may receive dividends and the value of shares may increase. Trade unions thus receive returns on investment and can use the money to finance their activities or to build up financial reserves (for example, strike funds). They may also do so to get access to company information for use in collective bargaining, or to get access to decision making on company policy making by taking part in shareholders' meetings which are the ultimate seat of power in a company as it appoints and controls the board of directors.

Of the above main forms of worker participation, the first four (shop-floor participation, works councils, workers' councils and worker directors) are usually referred to as *industrial democracy*, and the latter two forms (profit sharing and worker or trade union share ownership) as *economic democracy*. Industrial democracy and economic democracy must be seen in each other's perspective. The relationship between capital ownership on the one hand and control and management on the other is a crucial one in the participation process. The capital owners or their representatives (the board) exert control and determine policy. This is supported by company law and is often enshrined in the constitution of a country. Under industrial democracy there may be forms of participation which can be important for workers (like self-determination of the running of one's own workplace, or joint labour-management decision making on welfare matters, social affairs or certain personnel questions), without affecting the basic power structure of capital ownership. Such forms of participation are often introduced with full co-operation of management and owner or at their initiative. But the moment the prerogatives of owners and/or management are at stake, one cannot expect initiatives from their side to give up the exclusive right to control the workplace. Forms of worker participation which substantially infringe on managerial or employer prerogatives may be the result of negotiation with trade unions (mostly as an extension of collective bargaining), but are normally imposed by governments introducing laws which force companies to share important decision making with worker representatives, as was most prominently shown in Germany under the co-determination legislation. This 'legal intervention' in management and employer prerogatives was strongest in the 1970s in Europe and in the first post-colonial decades in some Third World countries (see Chapter 2).

Industrial democracy may also be obtained through economic democracy. Increased worker or trade union share ownership can put labour in a position to exert control on company policy and on enterprise management. This track is followed in a number of former communist countries in Eastern Europe and has led to considerable success in the past ten years (Vaughan-Whitehead 2003).

### *Workers' self-management*

Until this point forms of worker participation have been discussed whereby workers *share* decision making or profits or ownership *with others*. Under self-management workers do not share decision-making powers with others, but are fully masters in their own house. A typical structure of a self-management firm (although in reality there may be many variations) may be briefly sketched as follows. The workers of the enterprise (including the managers who are employed to manage the enterprise) constitute the general assembly (comparable to the meeting of shareholders). They elect (by secret ballot, on the principle of one-person-one-vote) the workers' council which is the centre of power within a self-managed firm. The workers' council is accountable to the general assembly, and not to any organisation or owner (nor to the state) which makes the capital of the enterprise available. Under self-management ownership is divorced from control and other decision-making rights. The only obligation of the collective of workers is to pay the capital owners an economic

return on the capital they use. Through the workers' council, the workers lay down the overall policy of the company and decide on the allocation of the financial resources, including wages and income policy and its implementation.

The workers' council recruits, appoints and controls the managers. It should be pointed out that under workers' self-management workers do not perform the management functions themselves. Management is done by professional managers with the necessary training and education. The usual hierarchy in executive management remains, but with the essential difference that the managers are not answerable to the representatives of the owners, but to the members of the enterprise. The self-management system is, therefore, also called *self-government*.

The main aim of self-management is the full self-determination of working people. It implies full industrial as well as full economic democracy. Self-management was introduced in socialist Yugoslavia on a national scale and in several Third World countries, including in post-independence Algeria (see Chapter 2). Self-management need not necessarily feature within a socialist pattern. This is demonstrated by the fact that for instance in the US(!) there were some 5,000 self-managed firms in the 1980s (Gunn 1984).

### **A Theory of the Dynamics of Democratic Participation**

Like democracy in general (Sklar 1987), participation is a lengthy, ongoing developmental process, digesting experience gained and drawing on new ideas, new events, action, policies and strategies which either directly or indirectly increase (but may also decrease!) worker influence. Democratic participation is a learning process for workers, worker representatives, trade union leaders, managers, owners and governments. It is also a struggle. Once a certain level of power is attained, the desire for higher levels, other areas of power and more effective and meaningful forms of participation may grow: democratic participation is a dynamic process which has to be constantly proposed, learned and defended (Kester 1996, 39–40). It is necessary to take the broader and the longer view, to understand the nature of participation as a learning process which may lead to the gradual further democratisation of labour relations. One worldwide comparative study demonstrates that whatever the conjunctural fate of worker participation in different moments in history, the subject matter appears to remain a fundamental one: whether under conditions of socialist states, mobilising regimes or peripheral capitalism, worker participation must be understood as a process, a movement, which sets in motion a democratic way of thinking – even when the actual forms of participation function with great defects (Bayat 1991).

#### *Dimensions of the participation process*

The formal structures of workplace participation do not by themselves guarantee an increased influence by workers on decision making. Even the most progressive piece of legislation may remain a dead letter. Are the forms of participation presented in the previous section of this chapter ensuring that, in practice, participation is

working in the interests of the workers? To what extent are the four major objectives of participation achieved: is there increased humanisation of work and of work relations, increased power of workers, more equitable income distribution and higher productivity and efficiency?

An immense research effort was made in a number of (mostly industrialised) countries to identify the critical variables for making participation more meaningful, effective and democratic, mostly referring to situations particular to a specific country, industry or workplace. From this multitude of research data a number of more generalised criteria can be derived which may help to understand and evaluate the development of workplace participation.

The practice of participation evolves in a broad economic, social, political and cultural context and is in constant interaction with that context. An open and dynamic definition is needed to do justice to these realities. Participation may be conceptualised as a process with five distinct dimensions:

- the structure and practice of worker participation at workplace level and beyond
- the degree of social acceptance of participation
- policy and strategy formulation regarding participation
- design of participation in concrete mechanisms and support mechanisms
- deciding the role of trade unions in the practice of participation, in social acceptance, in policy and strategy and in design, structure and support.

The *participation process* is the development over time of events, ideas, practices, strategies, actions, directly or indirectly concerned with democratic worker participation. This conceptual framework is summarised in Figure 3.3.



**Figure 3.3** Five main dimensions of the participation process



### The Practice of Workplace Participation: Meaningful, Effective, Democratic?

Table 3.1 summarises the criteria against which the following section analyses the practice of workplace participation.

**Table 3.1 Effective, meaningful and democratic participation**

Effective	Meaningful	Democratic
Formal status		Composition
Composition	Range of issues	Election procedure
Degree of participation	Agenda access	Gender equity
Level of participation	Worker preferences	Accountability
Facilities, resources		Protection against victimisation
Information, communication		

A first central research question is: to what extent do workers, directly or through their representatives, influence decisions affecting themselves? Participation may take very different forms – to be specified per situation or per country. It may be formal or informal, direct or indirect, it may be related or not to collective bargaining, etc. The structure of participation must be studied, as well as the way existing forms of participation actually function, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of participation in order to propose solutions for more meaningful, effective and democratic participation.

Worker participation will be more *meaningful* with the extent to which workers/worker representatives will be able to influence decisions which they themselves find of importance for themselves, their family, their society, their future. Worker participation will be more *effective* according to the extent to which workers/worker representatives, making use of their participation rights, will be able to influence decisions in the direction they prefer (Bernstein 1976). Effectiveness is expected to increase through competence, legal powers, higher degrees of education and training, an adequate support structure, etc. Worker participation will be more *democratic* according to the extent to which workers or their representatives may independently increase their influence on decisions that affect them, and according to the extent they are representative for the constituency they represent. Participation may be considered, intrinsically and obviously, an act of democracy, but this need not be the case. As various practices referred to in Chapter 2 have shown, workers or their representatives may be involved in decision making without having independent influence: there may be responsible participation, manipulative participation, etc., referred to as ‘pseudo participation’ (Pateman 1970). The democratic quality of participation will increase with the extent to which the workers or their representatives

obtain their participative positions by democratic procedure, derive legal rights from their positions, are protected in their positions, and take part in the evaluation of the effectiveness and meaningfulness of existing participation institutions and in their eventual modification or improvement.

*Evaluation criteria for the development of the practice of workplace participation*

There are a number of criteria that feature in the ‘performance’ of participation, and provide clues for its further development. Many of these criteria were introduced in the writings of Walker 1974, Bernstein 1976, Kester 1980 and Poole 1986, and lately again by Markey and Monat 1997 and Markey et al. 2001. The most important are briefly listed here:

- the *formal status of participation institutions*: ranging from no formal status whatsoever, through ‘voluntary’ (self-adopted rules and regulations), negotiated agreement between trade union and management, to ‘statutory’, or legally enforced
- the *composition* of the participation institution: minority, parity, or majority presence of worker representatives
- the *range of issues* on which decisions may be influenced: from welfare to shop-floor issues, personnel, organisation, production, company policy, and so on
- the *degree* of participation with respect to each of the issues: getting information, being consulted, having the right of co-decision, the right of veto
- the *level* of participation: the shop-floor level, the department, the enterprise, the branch, the national corporation, the multinational firm
- the *election or appointment* of the worker representatives: open or secret ballot, one-person-one-vote, partly or entirely trade union appointed, partly or entirely management appointed
- the *representativeness* of the elected or appointed members, for instance ‘proportional’ representation
- *equity in gender representation*
- the *accountability* of the worker representatives to their constituency: their relation to the workers they represent, possible procedures of removal, and so on
- the *protection against victimisation* of worker representatives: procedures to guarantee their employment, and their promotion chances if they criticise management in participation organs
- the *procedures* of participation meetings: who makes the agenda, who has access to the agenda, availability of relevant documents, who takes minutes, what follow-up procedures exist, and so on

- the *facilities* available to worker representatives: time for preparation and study of documents, funds for research, for communication, for administrative support, office facilities for filing, photocopying, transport facilities, access to training and education, and so on
- *communication* and *information* flow.

For all these criteria (and any other: the above list is not exhaustive) the research task is not only to describe participation practice but also to analyse whether on one, more or all these scores a movement towards more meaningful, effective and democratic participation can be observed; or inversely, whether there is stagnation or retrogression. Only in that way can clues be identified to bring participation forward. For example, if worker representatives get increasing access to the agenda and are able to put items on it that are of greater priority to themselves, this may increase the meaningfulness. If the degree moves up from consultation to co-decision, if worker representatives can better enforce a follow-up to decisions, increase the facilities, etc., this may increase the effectiveness. And if the representatives are increasingly elected rather than appointed, if accountability procedures are improved, if more equity in gender representation is achieved, participation becomes more democratic. Of course the above-mentioned examples are indeed only examples and can be much elaborated. The important remark to make is that when studying participation practice, it makes more sense to look at trends than at the status quo, identifying the potential for growth or the dangers of stagnation or retrogression.<sup>3</sup> Under this ‘participation process’ perspective two propositions may be formulated for assessing the dynamics. The first proposition (see below) refers to the increase in meaningfulness, effectiveness and democracy. The second proposition refers to the general direction of worker participation, taking into account the generally adopted conclusion of previous research that worker participation is essentially meant to allow the worker, as stakeholder in the labour process, to co-decide with representatives of capital (as argued when surveying the various forms of participation earlier in this chapter) on enterprise policy; in other words, to the extent worker participation moves from participation in executive management to participation in policy decision making. Participation in policy making allows workers to share in the democratic control of their workplace.

#### *Workplace democracy dynamics proposition 1*

1(a) Workplace democracy is more likely to gain in importance for workers if it is moving towards more effective, meaningful and democratic worker influence.

1(b) Workplace democracy is more likely to gain in importance for workers according to whether it moves in the direction of being an instrument of worker co-determination, rather than of information or consultation, on questions of workplace policy.

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3 See for this the ‘threshold theory’ of Bernstein (1976).

## Social Acceptance of Democratic Worker Participation

Whatever schemes or systems of participation are put in place by government, management or employers, they will remain relatively irrelevant unless they respond to a felt need for participation by the social structures for which they are meant. The propagation of participation and the introduction of participatory forms may remain political window dressing or even outright (management) manipulation. Whatever the magnitude and intensity of government or employer support, democratic participation cannot achieve continuity unless the workers concerned accept the concept and practice of democratisation and develop their own ideas and ambitions; only if workplace democracy takes root in the minds of the workers themselves can the participation process become a force of its own. In sociological language, workplace democracy will then become *institutionalised*, instead of remaining purely *institutional*.

In institutionalisation theory it is further assumed that sheer acceptance by the social structure concerned (in this case the workers) is not enough: the new idea has to be accepted and actively supported by a sufficient number of people and groups in power. This is the more important as traditionally institutionalised labour relations may have reached a high degree of stability, both structurally and culturally; that is, in terms of values, beliefs, roles, agreed procedures, balances in power structures, etc., involving not only workers and trade unions, but also managers, owners, government agencies and possible other actors who make up the overall labour relations framework. The development of workplace democratisation demands a process of re-institutionalisation around democracy as a new principle of labour relations. In the tug-of-war over direction and importance of the participation development, all groups in power will promote their own objectives (Poole 1986). Governments usually tend to see participation as an instrument of industrial peace and increased productivity. Management and employers have been diligently on the offensive in the process: they have tolerated democratic participation in general but dressed it up with their own values (more co-operation, better communication, information flow, better management, worker relations, social peace, reduction of industrial conflict, etc.), all of which is in management's interest as efficiency and productivity may be increased. Trade unions, if they did not reject participation on ideological grounds (dismissing it as reformism) or on strategic grounds (defending the trade union as sole channel of worker representation), expect workplace democracy in the first place to serve worker interests and, under reformist perspective, to lead to more democratic control, economic equity and better human relations.

### *Evaluation criteria for social acceptance of democratic worker participation*

The following features may be studied to get a better understanding of the possible changes in social attitudes toward democratic participation.

- The *valuation* of participation: what values are attached (for example, democracy, productivity, equity, human relations)?

- The perceived *decision-making prerogatives* with respect to welfare matters, terms of employment contracts, personnel matters, organisation of work, production and major business decisions: are these seen as exclusive management prerogative, or is it believed workers should have the right to participate in them, and to what degree (to be informed, consulted, co-decide or veto)?
- Preferences with regard to *ownership structure and ensuing rights of control*.
- General *attitudes to participation*: is it accepted or rejected? *Participation militancy and propensity*: to what extent do workers think they have the right to various forms, degrees, etc., of participation?
- *Participation confidence*: to what extent do they feel capable of participating?
- The degree of *acceptance or rejection of participation* and its development by *persons, groups, organisations in a position of power* (trade unions, employer organisations, relevant government agencies, and other).

Here again it is important to study the trends in the variables mentioned above and in many other variables not mentioned but relevant for the degree of social acceptance.

#### *Workplace democracy dynamics proposition 2*

2(a) Workplace democracy is more likely to develop if the workers and their representatives concerned accept it as of value to themselves and consider it their right to participate in workplace decision making.

2(b) Workplace democracy is more likely to develop if supported by collective organisations with power, in particular by trade unions.

### **Formulation of Policy and Strategy**

The concept of participation was for a long time associated with leftist political ideologies; it had become a battle cry of socialism. Also, mainstream intellectuals researching participation enclosed themselves in leftist territory. Several theories were formulated which claimed that self-governing socialism was a necessary condition for effective and meaningful participation (Horvat 1982). As mentioned in the brief survey of post-Second World War evolution of democratic participation in Europe (see Chapter 2), the lack of distance from leftist ideology when examining participation was severely criticised (Heller et al. 1998). Jaroslav Vanek, in fact, stood more or less alone for several decades in claiming that self-management was practicable on its own strengths (Vanek 1971). In Africa, government had been a leading force in the development of participation for several decades, setting objectives for participation in relation to overall development strategies, and relevant social actors (in particular trade unions) were used as transmission belts of party politics resulting in manipulative participation. Over the past decades governments have attached less or no priority to participation so that other actors have entered the policy and strategy formulation arena, with multiple and variegated perspectives,

meanings, expectations, short- and long-term goals, etc. This policy formulation process constitutes the broad framework within which participation develops (and is or is not supported and instrumented) and thus should be studied.

#### *Evaluation criteria for policy and strategy formulation*

- The formulation of the *objectives of workplace democracy* in perspective of a vision of society: initial, medium- and long-term objectives.
- Objectives of workers, trade unions, management, employers, government, political parties, the general public, etc.; *evolution of these objectives* (humanisation, power distribution, economic equity, human resource/ productivity development).
- *Strategic concepts of policy implementation*: assessment of economic feasibility (markets, capital, know-how, technology, etc.), political feasibility (political parties, co-operation or obstruction of, for instance, employers or trade unions), social feasibility (attitudes of workers, managers, the general public, etc.).
- *Choice of sectors* where participation may be initiated: public or private or both.

#### *Workplace democracy dynamics proposition 3*

3(a) Workplace democracy is more likely to develop if attention is paid and a balance obtained with respect to all four major participation objectives: humanisation, productivity, democracy and equity.

3(b) Workplace democracy is more likely to develop in a conducive economic, political and social context.

### **Designing Structures and Support of Workplace Democracy**

Participation is a dynamic ongoing process of policy and strategy formulation, based on evaluation of experience, and taking into account opinions and expectations by workers, their leaders, management, employers, etc. This means that the dynamic process requires co-ordination, organisation and support. Once formulated, policy and strategy need to be translated into a design of concrete mechanisms of participation. Institutions for participation have to be developed: this involves not only shaping the structure, composition, procedures, competences, etc., of the participation organs, but also the conditions have to be created to enable these organs to function and to develop: that is, statutory or legal provisions, structures for education and training, research, monitoring and evaluation, etc. Main actors in implementing participation in practice can be government, trade unions, employer organisations and management. Two aspects of policy implementation should get specific attention: labour law and the supporting structure. Labour law is vital, because it has been argued earlier that the lack of any legal protection or enforcement of participation rights has in the past been one of the major factors of participation failure in many countries. An

effective supporting framework for the development of participation is also essential, because it was the absence of such support that contributed to the lack of success of participation (see Chapter 2).

#### *Evaluation criteria for policy implementation*

- How are policy *objectives translated into actual forms* of participation? Do the structures correspond to the original objectives?
- What is the *formal status of participation institutions*? Is there legally enforced, negotiated agreement between management and trade unions, self-adopted rules and regulations (voluntary), no formal status whatsoever? (See also dimension 1.)
- What provisions are available for *monitoring and periodic evaluation*? Are there feedback mechanisms, research, inspection, and so on?
- What *provisions and resources* are available to assist worker representatives to improve their participation capacity (training, education) – and who makes these provisions available: government, trade unions, employers, private consultants, and so on?
- What *funding* is (made) available for monitoring, evaluation, assistance? Is this funding by legal obligation to be provided by the employer on the company budget, or through specific (occasional or regular) government budget provisions, etc. Who controls these budgets, who makes use of them, who benefits?

#### *Workplace democracy dynamics proposition 4*

4(a) Workplace democracy is more likely to develop if its structure(s) and procedures are regulated by formal and/or legal provisions.

4(b) Workplace democracy is more likely to develop if a supporting structure of education, research, backstopping, etc., exists and funds for this are available.

### **Trade Union Structure and Policy**

If, for the institutionalisation of democratic participation, the active support of relevant groups in a position of power is one of the conditions, the position and attitude of trade unions must be considered as of critical importance. Trade union support is an important condition for the strengthening of workplace democracy. The chances for effective trade union support can be expected to increase to the extent that the trade unions are meaningfully, effectively and democratically involved in policy and strategy formation, and in implementing participatory arrangements as these develop in the process. This role can only be played by trade unions that are democratically controlled by their members and that can act in functional autonomy when dealing with government and management. Trade union support is also needed because trade unions can act as brokers and as bridges in the participation process. Only a force that can be trusted by the workers can bind together different levels,

different moments in time and different issues at the heart of the participatory process.

*Evaluation criteria for trade union structure and policy*

The assumption underlying the theory of the participation process is that effective, meaningful and democratic worker participation cannot develop without active trade union involvement and support. The trade union dimension may be studied under three different perspectives:

- First, the *trade union condition*. Information is needed on a number of basic ‘facts and figures’ on trade unions: trade union elections (procedures, duration of office, turnover, etc.), information and communication, means at disposal, availability of basic texts such as trade union statutes, labour laws, etc., trade union activities, frequency of meetings, trade union motivation and ambitions and so on.
- Second, *trade union representativeness*. Is trade union membership restricted to the formal public and parastatal enterprise sector, to what extent does it cover the private sector, what is its membership proportion with respect to each of the sectors and to the total workforce? As it is generally assumed that women are under-represented, special attention should be given to an assessment of women’s under-representation in trade union structures and in participation organs, not only by establishing proportions of women’s participation in these structures but also by studying the possible reasons for women’s under-representation.
- A third main aspect of the trade union dimension is *trade union policy and strategy*. What are the expectations of trade union policy (in general, and in respect to education, to trade union action and activity, to participation) of workers, members and trade union representatives? What is the trade union policy and action to propose and/or press for more meaningful, effective and democratic workplace participation, to offer education and training and other forms of support? To what extent do trade unions monitor and evaluate workplace democracy experience, lobby for changes in legislation, and so on?

*Workplace democracy dynamics proposition 5*

5(a) Meaningful, effective and democratic workplace democracy is more likely to develop with active trade union co-operation, co-ordination and support.

5(b) Trade unions are a necessary ‘lever’ to make workplace democracy more meaningful, effective and democratic.



**The Underlying Assumption with Respect to the Participation Process**

The underlying assumption with respect to the participation process is that progress in workplace democracy can only be made if progress is made in each of the five dimensions described above: these constitute, together, the necessary conditions for the development of democratic worker participation. All dimensions have to be investigated if an assessment is to be made of the direction of the participation dynamics. This assumption and its elaboration in five dimensions constituted the lead of the research conducted on workplace democracy in Africa. The development of the research design and method of that research will be presented in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4

# Studying Democratic Participation in Africa

### **The Evolution of a Research Project**

In Chapter 2 reference was made to the fact that in Africa, in the past, worker participation was often introduced ‘from above’: single political parties, sometimes charismatic political leaders, or governments, rather than trade unions or the workers themselves, initiated worker participation and decided on its initial forms and development. Whether trade unions were side-tracked, co-opted or simply integrated in government and party, they had to choose their position and were under pressure from the workers to put participation to practical use. This pressure presumably became greater as manipulation of participation by management (under control of the government bureaucracy and ultimately of single parties) became stronger. By the end of the 1970s there was an increasing demand by trade unions to know more about worker participation and about ways and means of turning its instruments to the advantage of the workers. These demands led, eventually, to the beginning of the African Workers’ Participation Development Programme (APADEP) in 1982.<sup>1</sup> The programme was designed to assist trade unions to formulate and pursue their own participation policies, mainly through education and training. This also called for the examination of existing structures of participation and for the analysis of the participation experience at different levels: to achieve effective education and training, it was essential to understand the strengths and shortcomings of participation in practice.

The research conducted in this context was not set up as a scientific enquiry on its own. APADEP was and has primarily remained an education and not a research programme. It was the poor state of the educational materials available in the early 1980s, as well as the virtual absence of any empirical reference to African labour relations, trade unionism and workplace practice, that motivated those involved at that time to endeavour serious university-based research, and these efforts were linked to educational activities undertaken.

The most astonishing feedback from the early APADEP education programmes for national trade union leaders and instructors, in the 1980s, was that there was little information on the conditions of trade unionism in the countries concerned or

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1 APADEP was initiated as a partnership between the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), the Dutch Trade Union Federation FNV and the Institute of Social Studies (The Hague), and was extended to include many national trade unions federations and university institutions in Africa. For details see APADEP 1997e; APADEP 2004.

on major labour relations practice. To a large extent, this was the inevitable result of top-down state and/or party-dominated trade unionism where trade union leaders were expected to pass on political messages rather than represent interests and expectations from below. University research in labour relations either dried up, as in many African countries independent research was not welcome under dogmatic and military regimes, or labour studies were simply not on the agenda because they were considered as having low priority.

Early exploratory APADEP studies conducted in the mid-1980s, for instance in Togo and Mali,<sup>2</sup> showed that 'official trade union policy' linked to party policy was a concern for national, regional and only some local trade union leaders, but not for the majority of workplace-level trade union representatives, who were quite aware of the problems of workers but were frustrated when they wanted to represent these workplace ambitions, as their 'bottom-up' representation was arrested by 'top-down' indoctrination. They also showed that a lot of pressure was boiling at the workplaces and was understood by shop-floor trade union representatives who, however, were cut off from mainstream trade unionism in countries that were controlled by a single political party or a military regime.<sup>3</sup>

Through the results of the early APADEP case studies the need was soon felt that research was needed to feed education for trade union policy makers, educators and elected representatives. A study of African reality was necessary for the formulation of trade union policy, and also for education and training. But most educational guides and manuals in use at that time referred only to realities in either Western or Eastern Europe.

The co-operation partner FNV (the main Dutch trade union federation) was prepared to support more research in projects it financed, and a request by the CNTG (the national trade union federation of Guinea) to combine education and research in a vast trade union renewal project became a spearhead point in APADEP. Guinea had suffered many years under Sekou Touré's dictatorship, and in 1986 was one of the first countries with prospects of a pluralist democratic system (so it then appeared). The trade union movement had been under state tutelage over many years and wanted to democratically build up its structures from below. CNTG wanted to reach trade union structures in all the 36 *préfectures* [districts] of the country, covering 1,960 elected trade union representatives. By meeting so many trade union representatives all over the country, this offered a unique opportunity to collect data on their opinions, attitudes, conditions, structures, practices, expectations, etc. As all representatives were (supposed to be) literate, it was proposed to distribute

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2 See PADEP 1985a; Kester and Sidibé 1986. Case studies conducted in Togo and Mali are reported in Chapter 7.

3 It is often asserted that democratisation in Africa started after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is a myth. There is a lot of evidence that 'bottom-up' democratisation pressure was boiling in Africa long before then. Two influential studies substantiate this argument: Anyang'Nyong'o 1987 and Monga 1994. The same trend was also observed in exploratory APADEP studies in both English- and French-speaking Africa in the 1980s. Chambua describes extensively how the trade union democratisation from below in Tanzania started and moved up the hierarchy in the course of the 1980s and 1990s (Chambua 1997; Chambua 2002).

questionnaires to be filled in during the seminars that lasted one full week. The Guinea team started its pioneering work that was to be the foundation of future APADEP education-cum-research activity. A questionnaire was designed and administered among 1,960 grassroots trade union representatives, over a period of four years. The results provided a host of information that was of immediate value to the trade union. When eventually published the book was widely distributed and is believed to have contributed fundamentally to the democratisation of the trade union movement of Guinea (Baldé et al. 2001a).

#### *Trade union–university co-operation*

By the time interim results in Guinea were becoming available, and appearing to provide invaluable information, other partners involved were convinced that serious research to back up trade union education and policy was a necessary investment. A successful request for research moneys was made, eventually, to a Dutch government/university co-operation fund.<sup>4</sup> This research was to strengthen the role of trade unions in democratic participation, to allow them to make optimal use of existing democratic procedures (notably through education and training), and to formulate and pursue more vigorous democratic participation policies. Five specific objectives were formulated:

- to provide empirical information that could be used for the formulation of trade union policy
- to provide realistic backup to trade union action in participation
- to provide trade union educational materials based on well-analysed African reality
- to train researchers to conduct research related to trade union policy and action
- to enhance trade union research competence and capacity.

It should be noted that, as appears from the above objectives, research was not conducted for research's sake in the first place, but for the function of trade union policy formulation and education as well as of institution and capacity building. It was conducted in the framework of a project in which each country was autonomous and defined its priorities (including research priorities) in response to its own needs. From 1993, when this research project started, trade union federations and university institutions in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, South Africa and Guinea took part. Prior to this main project more incidental studies were conducted in Zambia and Togo.

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4 The Institute of Development Studies of the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, the Ecole Nationale d'Administration [National Institute of Public Administration] in Bamako, Mali, and the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague were the main partners in the research programme.

*A flexible research approach*

The general APADEP research design (see below) provided a framework for research but not a straitjacket, and a broad range of research topics was addressed as the result of the autonomy of each national programme to define its own research objectives. The specific country research designs were in most cases developed in APADEP international workshops where trade unionists and researchers from countries where research was already under way assisted ‘newcomers’ to develop their research designs and to master research techniques. The research objectives were defined by taking into account the priorities of the trade union of the country concerned.

International research comparability remained inferior to national research relevance; and as actual labour relations systems as well as trade union structures differed considerably from country to country, research agendas also differed. On the other hand, international project workshops and the interaction of researchers from different countries over a relatively long time (six weeks) made for cross-fertilisation and allowed for optimal inclusion of common research interests.

The central research theme was: how can workplace democracy become more meaningful, effective and democratic, and how can this be supported by the trade unions? This research theme was elaborated in a central research question, an overall research design, with a conceptual framework, a derived choice of research methods (questionnaire survey, case studies and trend studies) and a subsequent elaboration of the research questions and research design of each of the research methods. All these research operations have been elaborately written up in research manuals where further information may be found.<sup>5</sup> Democratic participation was defined as a broad and dynamic phenomenon that should accommodate differences between the countries and the development of labour relations over time. A ‘rolling research agenda’ was used to accommodate such differences.

In some countries worker participation was regulated in legislation or through more or less formal (statutory) provisions, like works councils or worker councils, or board representation, and research was done on the functioning of these formalised worker participation procedures. In other countries participation was less structured or informal, or consisted of trade union influence in decision making as part of or in the margins of collective bargaining or in national consultations, as well as other forms of representation of worker interests through trade union committees at the workplace or various forms of ‘casual’ participation. *All* studies covered the broad framework of trade unionism and labour relations in all their facets, in historic perspective as well as assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the trade union movement itself.

The upshot was that the common denominator ‘democratic participation’ covered a wide range of research topics. Yet all these studies made a deliberate reference to the initiation or strengthening of democratic procedure. All studies gave ample attention

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5 The overall research design is elaborated in APADEP *Research Manual I* (1997a), 53–64; the questionnaire research design in APADEP *Research Manual II* (1997b); the case study research design in APADEP *Research Manual III* (1997c), and the trend study, or longitudinal study research design, in APADEP *Research Manual IV* (1997d).

to the opinions, attitudes and expectations of workplace trade union representatives with respect to democratic participation. The common denominator of the research conducted may be described as *democratisation of labour relations*. The concepts of worker participation, democratic participation, democratic worker representation, trade union participation and so on are often close or overlapping and are sometimes used interchangeably, and are all captured under the concept in the title of this book: *workplace democracy*.

### *Participatory research*

By circumstance and context, the research approach adopted in APADEP was that of *triangulated grounded research*.<sup>6</sup> In this approach, the researchers do not set out with a preconceived set of hypotheses, but arrive, through constant comparison, at a number of discussional propositions. The conceptual and methodological design is adjusted after every round of research on the basis of new facts, new insights, reactions of the research subjects, of critical reading of interim reports and results of other research on newly discovered dimensions. In this way the research design is kept open and flexible so that the nature of the change process may be better understood. In doing so, attention was given to *the principle of replication*, an important dimension of grounded theory development. Briefly, replication means that if in the process of research, certain findings may be confirmed many times and under very different circumstances, research on these issues may be discontinued when a satisfactory level of 'statistical' or 'analytical' generalisation<sup>7</sup> has been achieved. Meanwhile, the 'constant comparative research' can have identified new research areas worth studying, and these can be easier taken up as research efforts on subjects already more or less 'known' are discontinued.

This research approach is in particular strengthened if it is, as in the case of APADEP, *participatory research*. The contours of the research as well as the research agenda were determined in constant interaction with the research object and subjects. APADEP's trade union/university co-operation was not limited to occasional meetings between trade unionists and researchers. Rather, the research conducted was a continuing joint activity between them in all phases of the research process. Research topics were identified together, a methodology jointly developed, and research techniques decided upon; the data were gathered together, interim results were presented to trade union leaders and other partners, and analyses were made in combined trade union/researcher writer workshops in which educational materials, policy documents as well as more general or academic texts were written up. Thus, the co-operation between trade unions and professional (academic) researchers in APADEP was intense: from research design, to data collection, interpretation and

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6 The grounded theory formation has been described in many books and articles. A classic on this methodological approach may be found in Glaser and Strauss 1967.

7 See Yin 1989.

reporting.<sup>8</sup> This is assumed to have had a positive effect on the validity and reliability of the research undertaken.<sup>9</sup>

APADEP research is in the first place geared to practical trade union use: research data are primarily used for trade union education at all levels, for trade union policy formulation, for campaigning for democratic participation and for 'higher learning' on labour relations. This principle has been honoured: the APADEP data bank was used primarily and extensively in the service of trade unions. The questionnaire data collected in APADEP seminars were fed back 'on the spot' to all seminar participants. All evaluations show this was much appreciated, and in a number of cases led to immediate (trade union) action to redress particular situations and to negotiate improvements of a workplace or of certain categories of workers. Also case study reports, once submitted to relevant trade union committees and or to management, were on many occasions followed up. Eventually, the APADEP research data bank was the very base for writing three study circle guides for grassroots trade union education, a more general workers' education manual, and instructors' guides. In addition, several national teams wrote education manuals for use in their own country, always based on APADEP research they had conducted. All national teams prepared reports on APADEP research addressed to the trade union leadership in their country as well as to the social partners, the government and the general public. At the same time, APADEP researchers also produced general and academic publications, and contributed to curriculum development and the building-up of academic teaching on labour relations at universities.

### **The Elaboration of the APADEP Research Design**

It was in the course of many national and international education activities that the APADEP research agenda took shape. These activities, in the 1980s, had also included workplace case studies, exploratory national studies on the state of the art of labour relations and a pilot questionnaire survey in Guinea. The accumulated experience was helpful for identifying research areas for the future, and for drawing

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8 When APADEP had taken off and was in full swing, in 1995, a substantive debate was held on APADEP's way of operation, in an international workshop of all education co-ordinators, research co-ordinators and general co-ordinators of national projects, together with the main international partners (in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso). One of the main agenda points was the trade union co-operation with universities. The roles, distribution of work and responsibilities of each party were clearly defined. It was stipulated that APADEP as a trade union project should primarily work towards the solution of labour and trade union problems. It was, at the same time, recognised that university researchers should conduct and publish research without trade union censorship (indeed they were asked to carry final responsibility for scientific quality), but that they should accept that they must give trade unions the right of first use of research reports. It was recommended that in each project a memorandum of understanding or a contract should be signed between the trade union and the academic institution on the terms of cooperation (see APADEP 1997f, 57–62).

9 This contribution to increased validity and reliability of research in APADEP, as well as in another major European research project of trade union/university co-operation, is discussed in Kester 1998.

up the research design. The central research question was formulated as follows: *how can the trade union movement achieve a more meaningful, effective and democratic representation of workers' interests through worker and trade union participation?*

#### *Dimensions of the participation process*

Research was not limited to the study of the functioning of particular existing experiences of worker participation. As argued in the previous chapter, the practice of participation evolves in a broader context and is in constant interaction with that context. Characteristic of participation is its dynamic nature, and the *participatory process* was defined in Chapter 3 as the development over time of events, ideas, practices, strategies, actions, directly or indirectly concerned with workplace democracy. This process was conceptualised as a process with five distinct dimensions. The main parameters of each dimension were elaborated in Chapter 3 in general terms, and constituted the framework of the main broad groups of variables included in the research design. These may be summarised as follows.<sup>10</sup>

*The practice of worker participation at workplace and at other levels* To what extent can workers and or their representatives participate meaningfully, effectively and democratically? To what extent can they make use of their participation rights, and which conditions are conducive or otherwise to the realisation of these rights? The key themes and groups of variables studied are:

- structure and forms of participation
- actual functioning of participation
- representation by women, by youth
- participation attitudes of management and of trade union leaders
- conditions of work and employment
- satisfaction with work, working conditions, employment
- satisfaction with economic conditions
- labour relations
- ownership and management structures.

*Social acceptance of democratic worker participation* A wide variety of values, attitudes, norms, perceptions and opinions of worker representatives was studied: with respect to power, to managerial prerogatives, to ownership, and also to participation itself. And also the attitude of persons in organisations in a powerful position in labour relations was studied, following the theory of institutionalisation, as explained in Chapter 3. The key groups of variables studied are:

- general attitudes to participation
- values attached to participation
- participation militancy and propensity
- participation confidence

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<sup>10</sup> See also APADEP *Research Manual Book I*, 1997a, 51ff.



- perception of decision-making prerogatives
- attitudes to ownership and management
- desired participation policy
- degree of acceptance or rejection of participation and its development by persons, groups, organisations in a position of power.

*Formulation of policy and strategy* As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, government had been a leading force in the development of participation in Africa for several decades, but other political and social actors started to attach their objectives, priorities and meanings when government support for participation started to fade away after about 1990. Other actors have entered the policy and strategy formulation arena. This policy formulation process constitutes the broad framework within which participation develops, and APADEP research has studied the policies and strategies of the main actors in labour relations, in the countries concerned. The key groups of variables studied are:

- the development of labour relations in the countries concerned, and on the continent of Africa
- the labour policies and participation policies of the main actors in labour relations: government, trade unions, employer organisations, and so on
- the perceptions of labour, labour policies and participation policies of the general public, civil society, the intelligentsia, the media, and so on
- the social, economic and political context relevant to the above themes and variables.

*Designs and support structures* What institutions for participation have been developed? What are the structure, composition, procedures and competence of the participation organisms? What conditions to enable these institutions (education, training, research, monitoring and evaluation) to function and to develop? What legal support is given to both participation procedure and to supporting structure? The key groups of variables studied are:

- the relationship between policy objectives and actual forms of participation: does the design correspond to the objectives?
- the status of participation institutions: casual, voluntary, statutory, legal
- mechanisms of periodic research or evaluation
- characteristics of a supporting structure: education and training for participation, financial and other resources
- identification of who makes the resources available.

*Trade union structure and policy* The assumption of APADEP as a programme is that effective and meaningful worker participation cannot develop without active trade union involvement and support. This assumption was introduced and briefly elaborated in Chapter 3, where three evaluation criteria were identified: the trade union condition, representativeness and policy. The following research themes and groups of variables were studied:

- trade union history
- trade union structure and membership, trade union pluralism
- the trade union condition: information and communication, resources, access to information, and so on
- trade union democracy: procedures of election and accountability to membership constituency
- trade union representativeness: the gender of trade union representation, representation of youth and of different sectors of the economy
- trade union activities
- trade union motivation and ambitions
- trade union policy (general, education, participation)
- trade unions' role in the implementation of democratic participation: support in education and training, making resources available, providing advice and assistance, and so on.

The above research themes and variables were studied by using three research methods (questionnaire surveys, case studies and trend studies with different emphases). The practice of workplace participation was mainly studied through case studies; the social acceptance of participation mainly through the questionnaire surveys; the policy and strategy formulation mainly through trend studies. For policy implementation and the trade union dimension all three methods were used.<sup>11</sup>

## The Data Bank

### *Questionnaire surveys*

The questionnaire surveys constituted a *research dimension of the seminars* resulting from the badly felt problem that almost nothing was known of the elected worker and trade union representatives in the countries concerned. Holding the seminars brought these representatives together for five to ten days in a row. This offered the opportunity to submit a questionnaire to them as part of the seminar activity. There were no funds available to separate the questionnaires from the seminars and conduct a random sample national survey. The *seminar dimension of the research* was also equally important. Giving every seminar participant the opportunity to give her/his opinion, express satisfaction or criticism, and come up with suggestions on a wide range of issues, motivated them to participate more actively in the seminar debates, and in general gave them a sense of democracy and participation. The researchers presented summary results of the filled-in questionnaires during the seminar, and this gave a further spur to this feeling of participation, prompting seminar participants to refer to the questionnaire survey as 'a referendum'. On the whole, the seminars were evaluated as 'very good' or 'excellent' in the majority of seminar evaluations,<sup>12</sup>

11 See APADEP *Research Manual I*, 1997a, 63ff.

12 Between 93 and 96 per cent of the seminar participants evaluated the seminars as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent' in Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Zimbabwe and Tanzania (APADEP 1997g, 141).

and the preparedness to take into account the opinion of every one of the seminar participants contributed much to these high levels of seminar satisfaction.

*A purposive, not a random sample* There were also many shortcomings, weaknesses and problems. A major difficulty concerns the sample. The clusters of seminar participants of all seminars taken together do not constitute a random sample of all worker representatives. The APADEP survey was based on a 'purposive' sample,<sup>13</sup> determined by opportunity. The opportunity was the holding of seminars where, across the country, trade union activists and representatives were together for a duration of at least five days, a unique occasion to get feedback, in particular as the seminars were held in all, even the most remote, parts of each country, covering large numbers of persons. The sample could be considered as a 'quasi-random sample', because a large (often majority) proportion of the sample population (trade union representatives) was included in the sample (the total of the seminar participants) and these participants in turn were selected with many biases which may be presumed to counter-balance each other.<sup>14</sup>

In some countries this has functioned better than in other. In a country like Tanzania where the trade unions at both national and local or enterprise level had access to a record of members and of elected trade union representatives, it was easier to control who participated in the seminars than in a country like Burkina Faso where hardly any trade union membership record exists, certainly not inside the country.<sup>15</sup> It would appear that Ghana, Mali, Cape Verde, Guinea and Zimbabwe were closer to the controllable situation in Tanzania.

A second sample problem is the deliberate over-representation of women. It is true that in almost all countries (Tanzania being the exception) the proportion of women in the existing population of trade union representatives did not attain 25 per cent. Yet, in APADEP the principle had been adopted that all seminars and workshops should respect a quota for women: first this was 25 per cent, later one third. As such, this norm had only noble principles: to mobilise women for trade union work, and to get to know more on their problems and desiderata. But the quota is also reflected in the sample of the survey, as the survey was conducted during the seminars. And in (most) countries where the actual proportion of women trade union members or leaders was lower than 25 or 33 per cent, the women were over-represented in the survey. This is another 'quasi' in the 'quasi-random sample'.

In summary, the sampling problem may be assessed as follows. A pure random sample would have been ideal. But under the circumstances, the purposive sample was the only practical solution. It is recognised that such a sampling technique has a number of inconveniences as described above. This should not, however, invalidate the survey. It is important describe in all honesty what the sample stands for, and

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13 See APADEP *Research Manual II*, 1997b, 5–13, for an extensive argumentation of the choice of this kind of sampling.

14 See Diallo et al. 1992, 31–4.

15 Hence a 'trade union atlas' was prepared by the Burkina Faso APADEP team in 1998; see Diasso and Ouedraogo 1998.

to accept the consequences. A purposive sample is an adequate instrument for exploratory description but not for testing hypotheses.

*Validity and reliability* The seminar setting under trade union auspices and organisation may have given the respondents a feeling of trust that could have been withdrawn if the research had been conducted by the university researchers alone. It is believed that it is precisely the trade union/university co-operation that has augmented the validity and reliability of the research. The fact that the researchers were able, in the course of a seminar, to present a number of important results, helped the respondents to see how research could give information that was useful. The researchers used a ballot box in which the filled-in questionnaires were deposited and this created trust in the anonymity which the academic researchers guaranteed. Seeing them co-operate with trade unionists strengthened their trust. An eloquent proof of the 'trust' of respondents in the setting of the survey is the almost negligible low level of no response among the more than 8,000 respondents. There are no cases of respondents who refused to fill in the questionnaire, although there is a small number of uncompleted sets of questionnaires, mostly for reasons of illness of respondents who had started to fill the questionnaire the first day(s) of the seminar but could not return on all days,<sup>16</sup> or of persons who could not attend on all days for reasons related to their work.

*Some basic data on administered questionnaires and sample characteristics* APADEP questionnaire surveys were conducted in seven African countries (Guinea, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Cape Verde) in the period 1986 to 2002. The distribution of administered questionnaires, per country where the survey is completed is shown in Table 4.1.

As can be seen in Table 4.1 the questionnaires were administered over a period of 15 years, and the total number per country differs widely. This is mainly due to the timing and nature of the education programmes to which the administration of the questionnaires was linked. It will also be noted that two surveys were held in Guinea, one in the period 1987–91 and again another in 2000–02. The first survey was conducted exclusively for trade union members of CNTG which, at that time, was the only national trade union federation, and the second one consisted mainly of members of a new rival trade union federation USTG (see also Chapter 6). In view of the different composition and respondent background, questionnaire survey results of Guinea will be reported separately in this book – and will be referred to as 'Guinea (1)' and 'Guinea (2)'.

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16 In Guinea such respondents were visited by the researchers at home, and in Burkina Faso even in hospital in some cases, so as to complete their questionnaires; it is unknown whether such practice existed in other countries.

**Table 4.1 Number of APADEP questionnaires administered, 1986–2002**

	86–87	88–89	90–91	92–93	94–95	96–97	98–99	00–02	Total
Guinea	360	1240	360					788	2748
Zimbabwe			110	110					220
Tanzania				423	520	173			1116
Mali				480	679	357			1516
Ghana					276	758	379		1413
Burkina Faso						200	480	360	1040
Cape Verde							320	178	498
Total	360	1240	470	1013	1475	1488	1179	1326	8551

*Sources:* Compiled by the author from APADEP survey reports: Diallo et al. 1992 for Guinea (1); Makanya et al. 1993 and Schiphorst 2001 for Zimbabwe; Chambua 2002 for Tanzania; Coulibaly et al. 2000 for Mali; Agbesinyale 2000 for Ghana; Reis and Rodrigues 2003 for Cape Verde; Kaboré 2006 for Burkina Faso; Dopavogui et al. 2003 for Guinea (2).

In Table 4.2 some basic sample characteristics are presented which immediately show the differences in the respondents' background in a number of countries, as well as some similarities. The last three surveys (Cape Verde, Burkina Faso and Guinea (2)) show a significantly higher proportion of female respondents, mainly the result of APADEP's increasingly successful insistence on gender balance through the allocation of quotas for women. This explains partly why the number of non-union respondents is higher in these three countries. Also in general very important differences exist with respect to trade union membership and the holding of trade union offices. In Guinea, Tanzania and Ghana around two thirds of the respondents were (elected) trade union officers when they filled the questionnaire, and this may be explained by the fact that these countries have long-standing trade union federations and also were able to communicate on the criteria for seminar participation. In several other countries there is a relatively large proportion of non office-holders and even of non-union members. This may look inconsistent when taking the intended target group (elected trade union or worker representatives) into account, but one is faced with a complicated situation that is all too realistic. It will be reported in Part Two of this book that, in particular in non-urbanised areas and places more remote from the capital city, basic trade union documents are often not available, and trade union adherence may be a question of feeling morally associated rather than being enlisted officially and paying union dues. In that sense it is not surprising that in Guinea (2) more persons declare that they hold a trade union office than there are self-declared trade union members. From the reports provided by the national teams it appears that the seminars, always convened and organised by the APADEP trade union team, were attended by persons active in the trade union movement, and these could well

be persons who were not formally members. When presenting the results of the questionnaires reference will be made to 'trade union activists and representatives', or simply to 'respondents'.

**Table 4.2 Information on questionnaire administration and sample**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
<b>General</b>								
Years in which questionnaires were administered	1986–1990	1990–1991	1992–1996	1993–1997	1995–1998	1999–2002	1997–2001	1999–2002
Number of respondents	1960	220	1116	1516	1413	498	1040	788
<b>Sample characteristics (percentages; N = 8551)*</b>								
Female respondents	26	20	31	30	28	39	36	35
Trade union members	100	99	98	82	96	68	78	65
Holding trade union office	79	54	80	66	74	34	na	70
<b>Age</b>								
Up to 30 years	10	30	11	10	9	na	29	13
30 to 40 years	64	43	50	47	33	na	46	38
40 years+	26	27	39	43	58	na	25	49
<b>Education</b>								
Primary	10	64	37	25	34	21	30	57
Secondary	56	35	53	67	52	59	51	38
Higher	34	1	10	8	12	7	11	5
<b>Job Type</b>								
Manual	6	77	14	11	25	24	30	8
White collar	67	23	70	88	68	29	69	87
Professional	27	0	16	1	7	35	1	5
<b>Economic Sector</b>								
Services	na	35	51	66	61	83**	72	70
Banking/commerce		8	13	1	3		2	8
Mines/industry		42	24	7	10	8	12	11
Transport		7	5	2	12		3	9
Agriculture		8	7	22	14	1	10	2
Other		-	-	2	1	8	1	-

**Table 4.2 Continued**

<b>Employer</b>								
Public	85	18	29	82	76	na	61	70
Parastatal	9	10	56	6	6	na	13	3
Private	3	70	5	7	12	na	24	10
Trade union	3	2	9	5	6	na	-	7
<b>Size of workplace</b>								
Up to 25 persons	42	9	21	67	35	51**	36	-
25–100	28	27	34	23	37	36	12	-
100+	30	64	39	10	28	13	52	-

\* In several cases, percentages do not add up to 100 because: no answer, not applicable, or another category of answer.

\*\* Includes banking/commerce and transport

\*\*\* Cape Verde used different categories: up to 30, 31–100 and 100+

na signifies not available

Sources: see Table 4.1.

Despite important differences in age composition, it is striking that there are relatively few young respondents, and that in Ghana not less than 58 per cent are above 40 years old. But in general (except Ghana) half of more of the respondents are between 30 and 40 years old. In Cape Verde 77 per cent of the respondents were between 25 and 45 years old. As for level of education it is striking that, except for Zimbabwe, the majority of the respondents have a secondary education level, and around 10 per cent a higher level of education; even 34 per cent in Guinea (1), which can be explained by the fact that everyone in employment was considered a ‘worker’ and could be a trade union member, including the president of the country. Correspondingly, the majority had white-collar jobs, if not professional ones, except in Zimbabwe. Again the majority worked in the services sector (including banking and commerce), mostly in the public or parastatal sector, and relatively few in industry or mining, Zimbabwe again being the exception: most worked in the private sector, 42 per cent of them in industry and mining. The size of the workplace where the respondents worked varied very considerably though it may be noted that by far the majority of them worked in workplaces of less than 100 employees.

### *Case studies*

In all, 67 case studies were conducted in ten countries: 36 of them were workplace studies, and 31 were studies on participation beyond the workplace or on specific themes or events. In addition to the workplace case studies, a number of further case studies were conducted by the national teams, and these include studies on trade union participation at national level and on trade union relations with the informal

sector (most of these were exploratory studies), and thematic studies of importance for democratic participation.<sup>17</sup> The timing is summarised in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3 APADEP case studies conducted, 1984–2001**

	84-90	90-91	92-93	94-95	96-97	98-99	00-01	Total
Zambia	1							1
Togo	1							1
Cape Verde	1					1	2	4
Mali	1		4	6	3			14
Guinea		1				1	8	10
Tanzania			1	3	5			9
Zimbabwe				2	1			3
Ghana				2	3	2	1	8
South Africa					1	1	5	7
Burkina Faso						5	3	8
Total	4	1	5	13	13	10	19	65

*Sources:* See Table 4.1.

The 36 case studies on workplace democratisation may be classified as follows.

*Studies on statutory forms of workplace democracy*

- Zambia – one case study covering 17 private and parastatal firms in the copper belt (1984)
- Tanzania – four case studies: a parastatal agricultural tools enterprise, a private fishnets industry, a public canvas mill, a public sugar cultivation and production firm (1992–95)
- Zimbabwe – four case studies: two private industrial production firms, a private tyre plant, and a parastatal printing company (1994–96).

These case studies normally focused on works councils or workers' councils, workers' committees and board representation. These studies were to assess the effectiveness, meaningfulness and democratic nature of formalised worker

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<sup>17</sup> More information on these case studies may be found in the *APADEP Information Brochure* (2004).



participation and to evaluate the relationship between trade union structures and statutory participation structures.

*Studies on non-statutory or casual forms of workplace democracy*

- Togo – an exploratory study of a phosphate mine, a beer brewery, a hotel, a machine factory, and a government office (1985)
- Mali – one case study of a self-managed furniture factory (1985); studies of a private batteries factory (1992), a private bakery, a parastatal dairy products factory, a post office, and a parastatal oil and cotton enterprise (1993–94)
- Ghana – two case studies of state-owned companies: a hotel and a shipyard/drydock company (1994–95); and a series of five case studies on privatised enterprises: a hotel, a farm enterprise, a cocoa processing company, a plywood firm and a gold mine (1995–98)
- South Africa – studies of a bus transportation company, a motor components industry, a medical device company, an engineering industry, and a fishing industry, all private firms (2001).

These case studies were more exploratory: what more or less informal forms of worker representation existed, what role did the trade union play, how effective, meaningful and democratic were the various forms of representation, what subjects were covered?

*Studies on trade union representation in workplaces* In these cases worker representation and participation occurred only through trade union structures, and included the following:

- Burkina Faso – a private beer brewery and a parastatal complex of oil, cotton, rice, bottling companies (1998–99)
- Guinea – a privatised perfume factory (1990), a parastatal banking corporation, a steel plant, a bauxite company, two transport companies, and a private beer brewery (1999–2001)
- Cape Verde – a private agro-industrial company and a petrol company (1999–2000).

The aims of these studies were to assess the meaningfulness and effectiveness of trade union representation, as well as the (possible) impact of trade union action on decision making in the companies studied.

*Trend studies (longitudinal monitoring)*

Trend studies constituted a third method and put the results of the questionnaires and case studies in the perspective of more general parameters of labour relations and their development over time. Trend studies in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Togo were completed in 1996 and reported on the history and present state of labour relations,

trade unionism, forms and experiences of worker and trade union participation. These studies were published in the book *Trade Unions and Sustainable Democracy in Africa* (Kester and Sidibé 1997). These trend studies were continued later on, also in the countries not mentioned above but reported more extensively in this book, and were reported in the final publications on these countries.

### *International comparison*

APADEP as a programme has had a comparative perspective from the beginning as the underlying philosophy was to create mutual understanding between different African trade unions and countries about the nature of their problems and their search for solutions. Exchanging ideas, experiences and expectations should enrich national policy making but should also lead to common platforms and stands at international levels.

The countries where APADEP research was conducted are not representative for Africa. The fact that three countries are francophone (Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea), four anglophone (Ghana, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa), and one lusophone (Cape Verde) allows analysis of data under different labour relation traditions, and the fact that three are in East or Southern Africa and five in West Africa allows analysis of data in different geographic regions. These differences may help to provide broader insights but cannot allow generalisation.

As the projects were and continue to be carried out in different or only partly overlapping periods of time, the research results are not strictly comparable across countries. For a number of 'structural variables' (referring to phenomena which cannot be expected to change rapidly over time) this time difference is not insurmountable, but to the extent that the variables become more 'conjunctural', comparison will become more difficult. When presenting data gathered at different moments in time the first aim is to show the reality in different countries and it will remain a matter of great caution when possibly raising hypotheses or conclusions of comparative nature. Such comparisons will always have to be well argued.

The time difference also gave important advantages. As results of the first projects came in and were analysed, the problem formulation could be elaborated and refined, new research agendas could be added, new methods possibly applied. This gave the overall research programme an important opportunity for the constant comparison and replication approach referred to earlier. This was less possible for the questionnaire survey (a questionnaire cannot be changed *en route*) but appeared very fruitful for the case studies which were designed to be replicative,<sup>18</sup> and no less for the trend studies.

## **Conclusion**

APADEP is a programme of projects in which teams of trade union educators and university researchers in a particular country define education and research

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18 As mentioned earlier, see also APADEP *Research Manual III* (1997c).

objectives and priorities and develop their own research designs. APADEP is also a framework of co-operation between countries where the search for mutual learning and development of a wider African perspective has been and still is an important challenge. The regular international workshops mentioned earlier have been very instrumental in developing this common ground. In practice many common elements were maintained in separate research designs, but each team operationalised research according to local conditions, culture and language.

The present book puts the research results thus obtained together and this was not an easy task, not only because each country study adopted its own approach. Turnover in membership of research teams, floating archives of research materials and a great number of logistic and communication problems were faced. A number of research documents were no longer available or accessible, and the existing ones were of very variable quality.

It is a matter of honesty to inform the reader of the weaknesses and constraints of the research reported here. It is nevertheless believed that the accumulated research results, in different countries and over a substantive period of time, allow the creation of comparative understanding of worker participation, trade unionism and labour relations in Africa. Thus a basis is created on which to discuss policy options. Of course, if this research is breaking new grounds, it is more at the beginning than at the end of the road.

PART 2  
Learning Experiences

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## Chapter 5

# Conditions of Work and Employment

This chapter sketches conditions of employment and work in the countries under review, making use of the results of the questionnaire surveys and of the case studies. Even when the aim of the project was to study the functioning of worker participation and representation, almost all research teams widened their research operations to include questions of employment, income, and conditions at the places of work – as these inevitably were recurrent major issues in participation and representation. The studies on conditions of work are in most APADEP reports confined to the respondents of the questionnaire surveys. In several reports, observations and interviews during case studies are also reported.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, it will present a brief macro-economic overview of the employment and income situation in Africa in general. Thereafter and mainly, the chapter will report on the employment situation, wages and salaries and possible additional allowances, on additional sources of income, and on a broad spectrum of conditions at work, from availability of toilets to transport facilities, on social relations, etc. On all these matters, the degree of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the worker representatives will be assessed. It should be pointed out, as explained in the previous chapter, that the respondents to the APADEP questionnaires are mainly trade union representatives and activists in the formal sector, so that the data here presented cannot be generalised beyond the target group of the survey. Where possible, reference will be made to case study descriptions of rank-and-file workers as illustration.

### **The Macro-Economic Context**

Questions of conditions of work and employment have to be seen in the context of economic development since independence. Employment performance and income levels are among the principal macro-economic indicators of the growth and development of a country's economy and the well-being of its people. For most African countries, however, performance has been dismal as far as these two indicators show.

#### *Employment*

Unemployment rates in almost all sub-Saharan African countries are on the increase. The average population growth rate of the continent is estimated to be 3 per cent, with the result that the potential labour force is constantly on the rise. The high

population growth rates have been sharply contrasted by economies characterised by stagnation, decline or, at best, slow growth rates.

The inability of the one-party or no-party regimes that ruled Africa in the immediate post-independence era to embark on paths of sustainable economic growth and development ensured that African economies would be liable and vulnerable to external and internal shocks. By the beginning of the 1980s most African countries had been pushed into the arms of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank as lenders of last resort. They were, under severe conditions, compelled to borrow urgently needed finances to enable them to survive at all. Those who delayed were to go later under even more severe constraints.

Measures taken under structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) have had catastrophic effects on employment. In most African countries, SAP has become almost synonymous with the prodigious retrenchment of labour. Public sector reform and privatisation have led to unprecedented job losses in these countries. Total unemployment in the formal sector rose from 7.75 per cent in 1978 to 22.8 per cent in 1990. In the formal sector in the towns and cities where the results were particularly acute, unemployment doubled between 1975 and 1990 from 10 to 20 per cent. In Ghana, 90,000 workers lost their jobs through retrenchment between 1985 and 1990, and up to 1995 over 200,000 workers had been thrown out of formal employment. In Zambia, between 110,000 and 200,000 workers were retrenched in 1992–93 alone, with more to be laid off in the following years. In Guinea, Tanzania and Cameroon, 40,000, 27,000 and 16,000 public sector jobs have been lost respectively. Similar pictures emerge in many other African countries. It is reported for Tanzania that civil service employment declined from 354,000 in 1993 to 259,846 in 1999 (Chambua 2002, 71).

Such figures are typical for the development of employment trends in Africa. But is not only the sheer numbers involved in this shrinkage. As Schiphorst observes for Zimbabwe for instance, the late 1980s and 1990s show a marked shift from permanent to a variety of non-permanent, casual employment contracts, and these are less protected by the Labour Relations Act. He quotes an ILO study that concludes that casualisation also extended to industry, where there is a particularly significant transfer from full-time to part-time employment among women (Schiphorst 2001, 32).

On the other hand, the pressure for wholesale trade liberalisation coupled with high interest rates have rendered local manufacturers incapable of competing against the influx of relatively cheaper imported goods on the local market. The result has been the diminution or collapse of local industries leading to further job losses in the formal sector. Besides, the high interest rates and massive devaluation of national currencies have created liquidity problems for local entrepreneurs that have made it impossible for the private sector to expand to absorb the growing numbers of the unemployed.

A major consequence of the decline of the formal sector in African countries has been the expansion in the activities of the informal sector. An analysis of the impact of SAP policies on employment in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe reveals that the ratio of formal sector employment to the labour force as a whole has fallen in those countries since the early 1990s. In 1995, the ILO reported that the informal sector of all sub-Saharan African countries employed over 60 per cent of the total urban labour force.

The particularly severe impact of job losses on women in Africa has been recorded. Less skilled workers have been more prone to retrenchment and women account for a relatively higher proportion of these workers. In Benin, Ghana and Senegal, women have been disproportionately affected by labour retrenchment, thus increasing their rate of unemployment. In Benin, when a retrenchment programme was introduced in 1987, women who lost their jobs accounted for 21 per cent even though they represented only 6 per cent of the workforce in the public and private sector combined; in Ghana, although accounting for only 23.5 per cent of the total employed workforce, 31.5 per cent of those retrenched in 1987 were women; and in Senegal, 20 per cent of women were affected by job cuts even though they account for only 12 per cent of the public sector workforce.

### *Income*

Trends in wage and income levels in Africa are linked to the continent's pattern of economic decline and the consequences of falling standards of living for the mass of the population. The indices of economic decline and crises – low or negative economic growth rates, growing unemployment, massive devaluation of currencies and high rates of inflation – clearly designate the fall in real incomes for the majority of working people.

The decline in real incomes has been exacerbated under structural adjustment by the removal of subsidies and the institution of cost recovery measures which have meant increasing prices for food and social services including health, education, utilities and transport. During the second half of the 1980s, the average decline in real pay was approximately 50 per cent.

APADEP researchers have made observations that corroborate these trends. It was observed that in Zimbabwe real wages, after an initial increase immediately after independence, eroded. In particular, the introduction of the SAP accelerated inflation; wage increases negotiated through collective bargaining in 1991 were, on average, only half of the inflation rate, and at the same time ESAP reduced cost recovery measures. School fees were introduced in urban areas and a fee for health service was introduced for people earning over Z\$400 per month, and these measures led to a drop in services for the poorer strata in society (Schiphorst 2001, 33–4). The poverty level in, for instance, Tanzania was such that in the 1991–92 Household Budget Survey 48 per cent of the households were unable to meet basic requirements, including food. That level rose well over 50 per cent by the year 2000 (Chambua 2002, 72).

Implementation of structural adjustment measures has thus imposed a regime of deterioration in real wages, with the hardest hit being workers at the bottom of the income scale. The erosion of wages and salaries is similar for several African countries with incomes in Africa being cited as the lowest on the world market.

Summing up, as Coulibaly et al. (2000) observe, the consequence of SAP was an unprecedented impoverishment of the masses of the people over the past two decades, so that one can only conclude SAP has failed; unless one was to believe that SAP was laid on for debt-servicing, in the service of international capital (as cynically remarked in Coulibaly et al 2000, 38–9). The Tanzania research concludes that SAP had implied, among other things, a heavier burden for women, a declining real



income for the majority, increasing inequalities among the people, disintegration of families, increased rates of unemployment, etc. (Chambua 2002, 69). In all fairness, the Tanzania study continues; other direct or indirect effects of SAP were the end of monolithic politics, more independent media and judiciary, a strengthening of human rights and civil society, etc. (*ibid.*, 70–71).<sup>1</sup>

### The Questionnaire Survey and Case Study Results

The descriptions of the questionnaire respondents in Chapter 4 show that they predominantly belong to the formal public sector, including government services, health, education, utilities, transport, commerce and banking. Relatively few are working in industry or manufacturing, from only 8 per cent in Ghana and Cape Verde, to 19 per cent in Tanzania (APADEP Surveys). Most are not working in privately owned workplaces, although significant changes are taking place. For instance, in Tanzania 29 per cent of the respondents were working in purely state or public enterprises and 56 per cent in parastatal ones, and this trend is quickly developing. As Chambua observes, most respondents who declared that they worked in parastatal firms during the survey are now working in privatised firms (Chambua 2002, 80).

**Table 5.1 Type of employment contract (Percentages; N = 4958)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Indefinite contract	na	na	93	85	na	59	74	88
Contract of limited duration	na	na	3	5	na	23	5	6
Verbal or no contract	na	na	1	6	na	18	14	2
No answer, or not applicable	na	na	3	4	na	-	7	4

na signifies not available

*Sources:* compiled by the author from APADEP survey reports: Diallo et al. 1992 for Guinea (1); Makanya et al. 1993 for Zimbabwe; Chambua 2002 for Tanzania; Coulibaly et al. 2000 for Mali; Baah 2000 for Ghana; Reis and Rodrigues 2003 for Cape Verde; Kaboré 2006 for Burkina Faso; Dopavogui et al. 2003 for Guinea (2).

<sup>1</sup> Many of the national APADEP studies describe and analyse the macro-economic context of labour relations in their countries: Baah 2000, 33–7; Diallo et al. 1992, 70–74; Schiphorst 2001, 26–36; Coulibaly et al. 2000, 35–40; Chambua 2002, 66–74; Kaboré et al. 2006, 9–19.

By far the majority of the respondents state they have a formal written employment contract, often with tenure, and in most countries studied they were typically in the civil service and/or in the public sector.<sup>2</sup> Only a small minority state that they worked without any contract or under a verbal contract (from 18 per cent in Cape Verde to just 1 per cent in Tanzania) (see Table 5.1). It is pointed out by several researchers that the trend is towards more contract formalisation on the one hand, but to less employment security on the other. In Mali, the present-day tendency is towards limited duration and part-time contracts (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 40) and the Ghana researchers observe that, on the whole, the trend is towards collective contracts and conclude this is the result of trade union action: ‘the unionisation in Ghana has provided the impetus for the evolution of better forms of employment contract achieved through collective bargaining’ (Baah 2000, 42). The majority in Tanzania, Ghana and Mali state they are covered by a collective agreement, but in Guinea’s most recent survey the percentage is only 38 per cent and in Cape Verde 18 per cent (see Table 5.2).

**Table 5.2 Individual or collective contract (Percentages; N = 6371)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Contract under individual agreement	na	na	n.a.	6	14	77	27	12
Contract under collective agreement	na	na	69	85	82	18	46	38
Other, or not applicable*	na	na	n.a.	9	4	5	27	50

\* Includes in Guinea (2) those who state they do not know whether they are under a collective agreement.

na signifies not available

n.a. signifies not applicable (other categories used)

Sources: see Table 5.1.

The majority of the respondents had stuck to their first job, around 60 per cent in Tanzania, Cape Verde and Ghana (data are available only on these countries). In Ghana, these ‘lifetime’ employees had worked for their present employer 20 to 30 years, the lack of other job opportunities being the main reason (Baah 2000, 41). The

<sup>2</sup> Baah 2000, 41; Chambua 2002, 75–6; Coulibaly et al. 2000, 40; Dopavogui et al. 2003, 59; Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 35–8; Kaboré 2006, 26.

majority of the respondents have never known unemployment (for instance 74 per cent in Cape Verde and 77 per cent in Tanzania (evidently as a result of the public service status), but in Ghana 35 per cent had been unemployed once or more, and of these 43 per cent had experienced unemployment for a period exceeding 2 years and 33 per cent for a period longer than 3 years, a result of structural adjustment and privatisation over the last decade (Baah 2000, 43).

But in the case studies the problems of insecure employment conditions come into focus sharply. An APADEP case study of a perfume plant in Guinea provides a picture that reminds of the worst of Dickens' stories of workers' exploitation in 19th-century England. Of the 500 people working there, only 45 were formally contracted, on a 'take it or leave it' basis, and they were subject to arbitrary fixing and re-fixing of wages. Another group worked under a never-ending part-time contract: this was renewed every three months to avoid the coverage of the workers by labour law. Other workers only had a verbal contract and could not be sure if there was work for them from day to day. The majority were women from surrounding villages who received no money but, in return for flowers picked and transported by themselves to the plant, they received rice.

The few employees with an employment contract were assured access to the social security system. Among these 'lucky ones', no one was pleased with the terms of the employment contract. Each contract was established by bargaining on an individual basis, on very unequal terms, as one laboratory assistant was told: 'sign or go'. Promotions were not mentioned. Several workers told us that after five years they still work under the apprentice contract initially offered to them. Yet they are pleased they have a contract at all: 'unemployment hangs over our heads every day' (see Perfinc Ltd case study in Guinea, Chapter 7).

A case study of a privatised hotel in Ghana revealed how terribly insecure workers felt under expatriate management. Workers were fired at the slightest mistake or misdemeanour and new ones employed. A group of female workers interviewed related how relieved they felt each day for not being dismissed. Strong feelings of employment insecurity among workers ran high in five other privatised enterprises studied in Ghana (see Chapter 7).

In a steel plant in Guinea, run by a team of Chinese expatriates, recruitment is described by an interviewee as follows: 'Who wants to work here has to be present at the factory gate early morning. One may have a chance: there may be additional work to do, or another worker may not have turned up for whatever reason. The Chinese will look at those gathered and whoever looks the more robust will get work for a day, for 1 dollar. At the end of the day the supervisor evaluates, and that is all right you can come back the next day. There are workers here who come back in this way more than eight months, without a contract.' Says another worker: 'Ever since the white people are in our country nothing has changed. Among us, there are slaves and slave vendors. Instead of sympathising with us, these compatriot slave vendors are at the side of the whites and offer us miserable salaries which unfortunately we cannot refuse'. 'Here you can lose your job any moment; it may be because you absent yourself one day but as well because the work finishes for lack of raw material', says a steel plant worker in Guinea run by Chinese. 'If you show you do not agree with your Chinese manager, it may cost your employment. They treat us as wild animals and if you react to their provocation, they may dismiss you instantly, without explanation' (Baldé et al. 2001c, 4-5).

In a case study in Mali [of HUICOMA, a modern oil-pressing company – see Chapter 7], it is mentioned how difficult it is to get a permanent employment contract. Someone who starts as a casual worker, paid by the day during the harvest season, may have to wait up to six years before rising in ‘employment status’, or to get a permanent contract. They now have to sit for an examination on mathematics, chemistry, language and general culture, and among the candidates for such manual work are persons with a bachelor’s or MA degree (Sidibé et al. 1994, 21–2).

In the face of widespread retrenchment and unemployment, most workers are ‘grateful’ to have a job in the formal sector where large numbers of their colleagues have been laid off through retrenchments. However much dissatisfied with the conditions of work, those who have an indefinite employment contract would put up with any amount of trouble to keep it. That is also why they want opportunities to prove themselves. It is especially the women who cling intensely to their employment contract. ‘It gives us a certain degree of economic independence, a certain respect and even a feeling of joy’, one woman said. The job and the (little) money it yields helps women to manoeuvre themselves out of the framework of almost complete dependence, if not oppression, in their households. ‘If you seek independence, seek a job’, said a young secretary. The women affirm that they use the money for unforeseen family expenditures, for medical care of their children, and above all to support their parents. The women who pick the flowers (in the Perfinc case, see above) are also very appreciative of their temporary job, even if it is only seasonal and does not attract an employment contract. They often have to make considerable sacrifices, leaving their village with lamps before dawn. At times they return only after sunset. They compete for this temporary work even if they do not receive a cash wage, which they would prefer.

Some 40 per cent of the respondents in Tanzania, Burkina Faso and the second Guinea survey, and the majority of respondents in the other countries, are not satisfied with their job security: they feel the axe above their own heads (see Table 5.3).

**Table 5.3 Dissatisfaction with employment security (Percentages; N = 7138)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Are (very, entirely) dissatisfied with employment security	63	57	40	61	na	72	42	40

na signifies not available

Sources: see Table 5.1.

*Earnings and household income*

The information on the nominal earnings in the different countries under review cannot be used for cross-country comparison as these have to be put in the context of local price levels and currencies; also, there are specific complexities in salary structures as in the civil services of Mali and Guinea.<sup>3</sup> But some indications of the level of real earnings suffice to show the penury of the situation. Coulibaly et al. calculated the mean monthly salary of the Mali respondents to amount to 45,000 CFA, the equivalent of US\$3 per day. Of this, a family of five persons (usually the families are much larger) could buy five bottles of fresh milk or 3 kilos of rice with that money (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 45). Baah observes that in Ghana there has not been any progress in real wages since the mid-1970s. The high level of inflation, rapid depreciation of local currency and IMF conditions (like limiting the public sector wage bill to less than 5 per cent of the GNP) have not improved the standard of living significantly; expressed in foreign currency, the minimum wage remained at the value of US\$1 per day since 1974 (Baah 2000, 47–52).

The fixing of wages and salaries in Guinea is reported to be a capricious affair, without any reference guidelines in the new private sector either. Everybody has to negotiate for himself or herself, except in the larger companies, such as the mines, where the trade union has concluded a collective agreement. According to the workers, further arbitrariness is introduced by an incentive system operated at the discretion of the department managers. The criteria are ‘performance, discipline and morality’, confirmed the managers. Incentive awards are kept secret. For casual labour, wage income may even be substituted by a system of barter as the following case study report shows:

These women work in the orchards of the company, picking jasmine and orange blossoms. The company leaves the organisation of work to the women, allocating certain sections of an orchard to a particular village, leaving the women to allocate the trees among themselves. The women do this by marking trees with their handkerchiefs, thus creating their own ‘territory’. Once a woman has finished ‘her’ trees and other trees are still available, fights may break out. There have been cases of women having been wounded in the struggle and by falling out of the trees. The company turns its back on such conflicts. The only relationship between them and the women, it maintains, is a commercial one: three kilos of flowers for one kilo of rice. According to the management, whatever means the women use to pick those flowers is their business. They are just trading flowers against rice and the company holds no other responsibility. This relationship is seen to be softened by offers of assistance and medical care, occasional transport to and from the villages, and bringing women to hospital in case of snake bites, malaria, and the effects of other work hazards (Kester 1991a) [for further details of the case study of the Perfinc Ltd’s perfume plant in Guinea, see Chapter 7].

Of course, income from employment may not be limited to wage or salary alone. In many cases, especially in the public service, there are allowances and

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3 For earnings and household income in Tanzania, see Chambua 2002, 87–90; for Mali, see Coulibaly et al. 2000, 40–6; for Guinea, see Dopavogui et al. 2003, 66–7; for Cape Verde, see Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 42–3; for Burkina Faso, see Kaboré 2006, 27–30.

entitlements. In Tanzania over 80 per cent stated that they are entitled to company housing, loans, provident funds, medical care assistance, transport allowances, child care and other benefits. In Mali civil servants enjoy an impressive package of leave allowances: apart from the annual one month leave, employees are entitled to leave for a number of reasons: illness, education or training, public interest like election campaigning, and special leave for up to three months for pilgrimage. Coulibaly et al. comment that it would be a waste of resources to increase salaries unless these generous conditions were corrected (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 42). Other benefits in Mali include night, production, harvest, risk, and responsibility premiums, housing allowances and payments in kind.

In the earlier-mentioned HUICOMA case in Mali, a full list of extras paid over and above the regular wage or salary is presented. These include: a night-shift allowance, a production allowance (if production exceeds plans), a protection allowance to laboratory workers, a responsibility allowance to supervisors, managers and directors, who in addition receive 5 to 40 litres of petrol per month, an equipment allowance, housing allowances of various sorts, plus in many cases free electricity and water, overtime work allowances, travel allowances, spectacles allowances, a company bicycle, motorbike or car (renewable from time to time depending on status), donations of wheat, meat and sugar on the occasion of feast days, construction loans, a company contribution of 5 per cent of the wage and salary bill to a social fund which provides full or partial payment of hospital costs, medicines, as well as birth, marriage and funeral allowances. Surely, management gets far more than the rank and file workers (Sidibé et al. 1994, 19–21).

In his case study of the Dunlop company in Zimbabwe, Schiphorst sums up the extra benefits, over and above the wage or salary:

... pension schemes, provident fund, educational programmes, including in-house general adult education courses and literacy classes, possibilities for study leave, contributions towards examination fees, and a scholarship scheme; savings and loan fund, medical facilities at the premises, company buses and a long-service award. Early retirement packages are on the drawing board (Schiphorst 2001, 282).

The researchers approach these entitlements with caution. The entitlement to a certain benefit does not imply actual enjoyment of the benefit (Chambua 2002, 103), and employees interviewed in Mali said that these benefits are not to encourage employees but to pamper directors (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 45–6). In Ghana the majority are entitled to pension schemes and medical assistance but these are not always provided and only a minority has access to a company loan or company housing (Baah 2000, 56). In Guinea about three quarters of all respondents state they do not get any 'extra': no housing, medical or social insurance assistance, no kindergarten facilities; only 40 per cent enjoy a pension scheme (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 70–1).

With respect to education and training offered and paid for by the employer, Tanzania tops the league: 14 per cent state they had up to one month's paid-for training, and not less than 42 per cent for a period more than one month; the larger the size of the enterprise and the higher the level of education of the employee, the higher the chances of employer-supported training (Chambua 2002, 81–3). In other

countries under review such opportunities were rather less. In Mali 59 per cent were never offered further training, 31 per cent for only several weeks, and less than 10 per cent for longer than one month (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 44). In Cape Verde only 25 per cent received some form of training by the employer and also here the chances for such support rose with the level of education (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 24).

Although it is impossible to compare the earnings, allowances and entitlements across countries, one can compare the degree of satisfaction with these in the different countries. Dissatisfaction with earnings is very high, as shown in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4 Dissatisfaction with salary (Percentages; N = 8551)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Are (very, entirely) dissatisfied with salary	95	90	85	81	91	88	80	87

Sources: see Table 5.1.

**Table 5.5 Ability to meet basic needs (Percentages; N = 6815)**

Percentage of trade union representatives who consider their income not sufficient to meet the costs of the following basic needs ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... to buy food	92	na	89	na	67	76	89	82
... to buy clothes	96	na	92	na	72	76	88	91
... to pay for children's education	88	na	95	na	72	74	81	85
... to pay for electricity/ water	84	na	84	na	65	75	70	89
... to buy charcoal/ firewood	80	na	82	na	65	n.a.	76	50

... to pay for medical care	91	na	92	na	69	79	91	90
... to pay for transport	na	na	92	na	68	78	80	na

na signifies not available

n.a. signifies not applicable

Sources: see Table 5.1.

The wage or salary is seldom considered enough for a living (this is stated by over 90 per cent in all the countries) and Table 5.5 specifies that indeed by far the majority of basic needs cannot be met by the respondents. Most of them are not able to meet the costs of food, clothes, education, electricity, water, firewood, medical care, transport and rent. Two studies typify this situation:

Slightly more than 50 per cent of the respondents indicated that household income was not sufficient for paying children's education and medical care expenses. ... government used to offer free medical services and education before it adopted IMF/World Bank-sponsored SAPs in the mid-1980s. From there on to date, people have to pay for these services. Worse still, government budget cuts in the financing of social services have had the effect of lowering the quality of services, particularly education and health, offered by the government. This in turn has had the effect of making many people to prefer to go to private hospitals and send their children to private schools. The fees charged by private hospitals and schools are very high since these are profit-making ventures. The same also is true of transport in that before SAPs, the transport of people was mainly by public-owned companies and hence, fares were set by the government. The situation has changed after the adoption of SAPs to domination by private companies which raised transport charges. No wonder that only 5 to 8 per cent of the respondents indicated that their household income was sufficient to meet medical care, education of children and transport expenses (Chambua 2002, 104–5).

In the earlier-mentioned steel plant in Guinea one worker sums up his situation. He earns 120,000 FG (Guinean francs) per month (equivalent to 60 [US] dollars at the time) for a six-day week. Of this salary he pays 28,800 FG for transport to work, and 12,000 for lunch at the workplace, thus only 40 dollars remain. 'One day,' he says, 'we went on strike to get better pay but management phoned to Conakry and some time later a truck with police arrived and took us to their base; there each of us was beaten up 50 times, and the union leader was dismissed' (Baldé et al. 2001c, 7).

Against the background of such high dissatisfaction with earnings and household income, how do these respondents make ends meet? The income question is a complex one and relates to the size of households and the number of income earners within them. Most respondents are married and have children of school-going age, and often the household is enlarged by the extended family: parents and grandparents and other family members. Of the respondents in Guinea 40 per cent state their household is bigger than 10 members, up to over 20, and in 70 per cent of these households there are only one or two members with an earning from employment



(Diallo et al. 1992, 77). In Mali, 30 per cent of the respondents have to cater for 6 or more members of their household (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 97); in Cape Verde 56 per cent cater for more than 5 household members (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 44). On average, each worker in the countries surveyed has between 3 and 7 persons to cater for (Adu-Amankwah and Kester 1999, 21). The situation is exacerbated by the virtual absence of any schemes of social welfare in the countries. Thus it is not surprising that only a (and sometimes a tiny) minority of the respondents declare their household income is enough (see Table 5.6.).

**Table 5.6 Degree of satisfaction with household income (Percentages; N = 8053)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Enough	18	15	32	31	12	na	23	9
Hardly enough	58	50	53	60	46	na	43	16
Not enough	24	35	15	9	42	na	34	75

na signifies not available

Figures are percentages of respondents answering the question: 'Is the total income earned by your household enough to make ends meet?'

Sources: see Table 5.1.

Almost all respondents report being involved in additional economic activities to make ends meet. Unable to survive on their wages, they are compelled to engage in many additional activities. In the francophone countries one refers to 'system D' (D for *débrouillardise* [getting around]): this is the general name for the many informal activities for generating and supplementing an income to stay alive. In pilot studies a number of these activities were identified and in the subsequent questionnaires more systematic information was obtained. The activities may include agriculture (cultivating beans, cocoa, cassava, maize, fruits, rice, coffee, yam, palm and so many other crops), craft work (tailoring, basketry, carpentry, pottery, etc.), commercial activities (shoe repairs, kiosks, transport and other small businesses or petty trading), fishing, and animal husbandry (cattle, sheep, goats, chickens, pigs, etc.).

In Table 5.7 one finds the number of extra activities in which the respondents and the members of the household to which they belonged, are engaged in. Around 10 per cent or less state their household (presumably the small ones) does not engage in extra activities, but the other 90 per cent appear much and indeed often very much engaged in extra activities.

In summary, the 'level of income' should rather be expressed with reference to the total sum of household earnings and system D income than to the wage or salary of the individual earner. The household (usually consisting of (many) more than 5 members) survives on the monetary income of the employee-earner (only

sometimes more than one) as well as from the income in kind or from petty trade by the remaining members of the household, usually women and children, as well as the extra inputs by the wage-earners themselves. The Mali researchers observe that overall, the ‘parallel activities’ may become the main activities for survival, and this, they say, is not so much a victory over the formal sector, but a defeat of that formal sector (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 48).

**Table 5.7 How to make ends meet (Percentages; N = 7013)**

Percentage of households of respondents who are engaged in extra activities ‘to make ends meet’ ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... no such activities	13	5	3	6	11	na	na	10
... 1 to 5 activities	68	17	24	36	39	na	na	64
... 6 to 10 activities	18	42	28	30	27	na	na	15
... 11 to 15 activities	1	26	20	15	15	na	na	7
... more than 15 activities	-	10	25	13	8	na	na	4

na signifies not available

Sources: see Table 5.1.

Several researchers have pointed out that this situation is counterproductive from an economic point of view. Baah observes that:

... the growing tendency on the part of workers in Ghana to engage in extra income-earning activities aside from their regular paid jobs should have serious implications for productivity at their workplaces and for the nation at large. Apart from spending some of the person-hours meant for their regular jobs on their personal economic activities, much to the detriment of their employers, workers also spend their rest hours (after office hours) looking for extra income which inevitably affect their output at the workplace (Baah 2000, 54).

### Workplace Conditions: A Breeding Ground for Discontent

The respondents to the questionnaires express dissatisfaction with a host of workplace conditions (see Table 5.8). The aggregate percentages of 'dissatisfied', 'very dissatisfied' and 'entirely dissatisfied' are shown. Whatever the differences between countries there is a widespread, and often bitter, discontent with salaries, working conditions, transport facilities, canteen and sanitary facilities, health and safety conditions, personnel policy, employment security and workplace management.

**Table 5.8 Dissatisfaction with workplace conditions (Percentages; N = 8551)**

Percentage of trade union representatives who are 'dissatisfied', 'very dissatisfied' or 'entirely dissatisfied' with the following conditions ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... hygiene	70	44	35	58	41	65	55	34
... safety/ health	69	50	38	69	45	72	71	48
... canteen	89	32	52	n.a.	75	n.a.	90	48
... toilet/ washroom	86	54	30	57	57	n.a.	71	61
... transport	85	73	54	63	61	n.a.	68	51
... work itself	26	50	18	18	33	34	32	12

n.a. signifies not applicable (categories not used)

Sources: see Table 5.1.

The majority have access to such basic facilities as a toilet and, mostly, a canteen, but a considerable number of respondents miss one or both of these facilities, and those who have are not necessarily satisfied. In Tanzania, only 4 per cent state they do not have toilet facilities, 13 per cent in Cape Verde, 18 per cent in Guinea, 21 per cent in Mali, 23 per cent in Ghana and 24 per cent in Burkina Faso. Of those who have toilet facilities, in Guinea 40 per cent say these are not in satisfactory condition, and in Cape Verde 18 per cent state they are in a bad state and 5 per cent report

them not to be in working order.<sup>4</sup> Apart from Cape Verde where three quarters of the respondents have access to a canteen, the majority in the other countries surveyed have no canteen and have to bring their food or go outside to eat (53 per cent in Tanzania and not less than 75 per cent in Ghana). In Tanzania there are still many public firms that offer subsidised food in canteens, yet the majority are dissatisfied with these canteens.

The workers are irate about the lack of drinking water: 'We drink from a little river in the neighbourhood'. There are taps with filtered drinking water in the office of the director but this is accessible only to some office workers. Similarly, showers and toilets are reserved for management, while workers have to go into the bush. No provision is made for food: 'During our research we met people who had not eaten for more than a day'. The company has no canteen, so the workers themselves have made an arrangement with a woman who comes to sell rice at a stand. Very often people have no money to buy food from her. Many claim to leave their house at six o'clock in the morning to come back at five o'clock in the evening without having eaten. They are bitter that the company does not take an initiative in this area (Kester 1991a).

Another important basic condition is transport to and from work, and also here dissatisfaction runs high. The current spiralling rates of urbanisation in Africa fuelled by the mass movement of people from rural areas into urban centres and the consequent sprawling of urban centres have meant that workers have to commute over fairly long distances between their places of residence and work. Few respondents live within short distances of their workplaces. The vast majority either walk or cycle daily for long distances to get to their precious job. Most cannot afford to pay the high cost of public transport and, across the board, the majority do not receive any transport assistance from their employers. Transport allowances or company buses, when offered, are more frequent in public firms in Ghana and Tanzania than in Mali and Guinea, but currently, once the enterprises are privatised, company buses are often sold. And where transport allowances or facilities are provided, the majority of respondents are not satisfied with these.

The Perfinc case study report in Guinea mentions that:

... transport is another source of frustration. The only company vehicle to transport personnel does not run, due to a lack of petrol. Most come to work by foot. Many of the women who pick flowers have to walk seven to ten kilometres to bring the flowers for sale to the company. They do this while carrying their babies on their back and the flowers on their head.

In a Tanzania case study a description was made of one of the shoes of an interviewed worker:

Twenty-six stitches could be counted in the shoe and yet two of his toes were peeping out. He usually came to work on foot because he could not afford to pay the *daladala* [minibus] fare twice daily. And if he came by bus (he said he treated himself to a ride

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4 Coulibaly et al. 2000, 43; Chambua 2002, 85; Dopavogui et al. 2003, 60; Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 21; Baah 2000, 56; Kaboré 2006, 31.

occasionally) he may hang on the side of the bus. If seated he might be splattered with the faeces of the chicken the trader next to him carried on [their] lap (field notes from the case study Mbeya Farm Tools Plant).

Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents, whether in public or private enterprises, expressed utter dissatisfaction with transport facilities and conditions: above 50 per cent in all countries and not less than 73 per cent in Zimbabwe and 85 per cent in Guinea, where the dissatisfaction score is sky-high for all aspects of working conditions. The problems appear to be lowest in Cape Verde where the average home-work distance is short – 14 minutes (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 21). Of the respondents, 55 per cent go to work on foot, the rest on private or public transport, and only 11 per cent make use of transport provided by the employer (Adu-Amankhah and Kester 1999, 16–17).

Health, safety and hygiene are other important indicators of the assessment of working conditions. Trade unions, governments and employers have shown concern over these, over the years. The Ghana report goes into much detail:

Government has passed laws to ensure safe, hygienic and healthy work environment. The Factories, Offices and Shops Act was passed in 1970 to protect workers in offices, shops and factories. The law covers, among other issues, health, safety and welfare of workers. Specific aspects of health covered by the law include: cleanliness, overcrowding, ventilation, washing facilities, lighting, drainage of floors, sanitary conveniences, drinking water, sitting facilities, removal of dust and fumes, protective clothing and appliances, noise and vibrations, prohibition of lifting of excessive weights and first aid. Safety issues included in the law are: prevention of fire, fire alarms, safety provisions in case of fire, safe means of access and safe place of employment, floors, passages and stairs, cleaning machinery, safeguards for transmission machinery and construction and maintenance of fencing, and so on. ... The law also spells out clearly all the offences and legal proceedings. Inspectors were appointed to implement the Act. The law gives the inspectors the power to enter, inspect and examine, by day or by night, every part of the workplace ... and have the power to make inquiries to ascertain whether the provisions of the Act and of all other enactment in force relating to occupational public health are complied with (Baah 2000, 44).

Six other laws enacted in Ghana are quoted in the Ghana study, all pertaining to occupational health and safety, and mention is made of national institutions that have been charged to ensure this, including the Occupational Health Unit of the Ministry of Health, the Labour Department and Factories Inspectorate under the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare, and the Mines Department under the Ministry of Mines and Energy. The study continues:

The purpose of the extensive discussion of the laws regarding occupational health and safety is to show that Ghana has a adequate legal and institutional framework to ensure a clean and safe working environment at all workplaces in all sectors of the economy. However, the situation on the ground leaves much to be desired. After more than three decades of the existence of these laws and some of the above mentioned institutions, many workplaces in Ghana, apart from the presence of many occupational hazards, lack basic facilities such as toilets, drinking water and washrooms. It was, therefore, not surprising that 86 per cent of the respondents were not satisfied with hygiene and health and safety.

Workers have expressed similar views in other surveys conducted ... revealing very appalling health and safety standards in some mining companies in the country. Workers in the mining industry in Ghana face safety hazards related to falling material, fall of the ground, fire outbreaks, slips and falls and hazards related to handling, trucking, machinery and haulage. Health hazards such as those related to noise, exposure to chemicals, dust, gassing, vibration, heat and fumes are also present in the mines. The result has been an upsurge of diseases like respiratory infections, waist pains, skin diseases, stress and tuberculosis in the industry. Despite the presence of the hazards, the survey revealed that all the stakeholders in the industry namely employers, workers and government are not taking health and safety issues seriously (Baah 2000, 45).

The Ghana study goes on to quote other studies (such as those by OATUU) coming to the same conclusions, and bitterly observes that in Ghana at the time of the APADEP survey, 83 per cent of the respondents reported they had no Health and Safety Committee at their workplace, and those who had, said they were not meeting regularly (*ibid.*, 46). In three case studies in 1999 and 2000 in Guinea (a steel and iron plant, a brewery and a bauxite company), occupational risks were reported high and frequent: excessive heat, noise, dust, explosions, accidents, breakages, etc. The study of the steel and iron plant is very telling indeed, and was reported under the title *Modern Slavery*. The case studies in Zimbabwe and Mali also described appalling working conditions. Here is an anthology:

In the part of the plant where nails were produced the noise was deafening; here as everywhere else in the plant the contact between workers and dangerous products is direct. Nothing is done to reduce the risk of getting hurt by a piece of iron ... there is an excessive heat, the working conditions are inhuman; here, the danger of an explosion is real. One worker reports: 'When we are at work, it could happen that the Chinese manager would rather get out, and close us in into the terrible heat, taking the key. For him, the risk of us stealing the nails is more important than the risk of an explosion that could entail the death of people'. This testimony tells us a lot of the working climate in such a company (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 61–2).

At the back of the hall is a small canteen and across a yard from there the stench of hot bitumen points to the enormous shed where canvas tarpaulins are dipped into a bitumen bath. The large canvas sheets, measuring some twenty square metres are hung on electrical winches that pull them through a bath with slowly simmering tarry porridge. Once the canvas is bitumised, the sheets are left to dry in the wind, hanging [from] winches to the rooftop at the far end of the shed. The smell of tar is pinching and the wind carries drips of hot tar. Workers, their heads and faces covered in rags to protect them from the drips and their noses from the stench of hot tar, have to make sure the sheets are properly drenched in their bath. With sticks they push the canvas in the black mass and see to it that the pull movement of the winches is not obstructed. The machines have taken away most of the physically heavy work but it is still demanding; the smell is everywhere, and the heat is difficult to sustain for a prolonged period (Schiphorst 2001, 247).

Adjacent to the offices and on one of the long sides is the sand section: in between heaps of sand there is a grinding mill producing very fine black sand, on the outside loop and the engines of the conveyor belt system which transports the black sand through the foundry. Moving towards the open-ended hall on the one side are stacks of finished manhole covers

while a small design workshop stands a little off the path ways, just opposite the open end of the hall. Inside the hall, everything is black: the ground is covered with a decimetre-thick layer of black sand, the workers are black, wearing black cloths covering their faces for protection against the black dust that hangs like a thick fog in the hall. It is barely lit here, and the main light comes from the sparks that fly out of the furnaces and from the buckets of red-hot iron which two workers carry between them, bungling on a stick, glimmering in the fog. The iron is melted in three furnaces located at a long side of this hall. Once the iron is ready the furnace gate is opened with a long pole and the iron pours into the bucket with a lot of splashes and sparks. There are no protective shields or walls to shelter the furnace opener from this. The two men who carry the bucket in which the iron is poured too do not have any protection other than gloves and rags around their faces. The iron is carried over a distance of some 25 metres to the moulds that have already been filled with fine sand. The moulds are placed on little trolleys on iron rails and left to cool down. The sand is transported into the hall over a conveyor belt running close to the ceiling above the heads of the people working below. When the moulds have to be filled with sand, a worker pulls a cord and a bucket of sand falls over from the belt, emptying its content in the mould spilling quite a lot in the process. Moreover, in falling from the belt to the mould the fine sand blows away adding to the fog in the hall. Once the iron in the mould has set and cooled off a little bit, the moulds are opened, and its content – still far too hot to handle without proper protective gear – is left on the floor which is covered by a thick layer of black dusty sand from previous moulds (Schiphorst 2001, 260–1).

Working conditions are often appalling. In most countries labour legislation demands good working conditions but poor labour inspection and widespread ignorance of such legal provisions by trade union representatives and activists are notorious bottlenecks for getting these provisions implemented. As will be shown in Chapter 6, less than 20 per cent of the survey respondents are aware of the labour legislation in force in their countries.

### *Work itself and social relations*

Satisfaction with work itself is more positive, especially in Tanzania and Mali, and this appears to be irrespective of size and type of workplace, public or private. On the other hand, however, levels of dissatisfaction with other aspects of work have a significant influence on the satisfaction with work itself. This should explain why dissatisfaction with work is higher in Ghana and Zimbabwe where dissatisfaction scores are considerably higher in many aspects. The relatively high degree of dissatisfaction with work in Ghana (33 per cent) is attributed by the Ghana researchers to low levels of remuneration and other aspects of work (Baah 2000, 43), and the same explanation may be valid for Zimbabwe. ‘Intrinsic’ satisfaction with work must also be related to ‘having a job’ or ‘having employment’.

As far as conditions at the workplace are concerned, there is at least one area where satisfaction reigns: workers are generally satisfied with their relations with colleagues. In Guinea (1), human relations at the workplace are almost perfect: only 2 per cent are not satisfied with social relations with colleagues, as shown in Table 5.9 (although this has increased slightly to 7 per cent by the time of the Guinea (2) study). Relations with supervisors and managers are mostly satisfactory: dissatisfaction does not exceed one third. Dissatisfaction rises further when directors

(board members) or owners come in sight. Some case study data on Ghana and Guinea have also shown instances of very poor relations between managers and workers. For instance, relations between management and workers in a privatised hotel and a gold mine in Ghana, all managed by expatriate staff, are reminiscent of the apartheid situation in South Africa (see Chapter 7).

**Table 5.9 Dissatisfaction with social relations at work (Percentages; N = 8551)**

Percentage of trade union representatives who are 'dissatisfied', 'very dissatisfied' or 'entirely dissatisfied' with social relations with ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... fellow workers	2	15	4	7	7	21	13	7
... supervisors	30	55	18	22	17	37	29	17
... managers	36	66	25	23	26	40	30	26
... directors	29	66	38	26	n.a.	n.a.	36	n.a.
... owners	41	n.a.	n.a.	34	n.a.	n.a.	44	n.a.

n.a. signifies not applicable (categories not used)

Sources: see Table 5.1.

But the overall picture of good relations with supervisors and management should present favourable perspectives for the development of worker participation at places of work. This is the more so as it appears from analysis that factors such as type or size of enterprise, and level of education of respondents did not have significant bearing on social relations. Also other conditions of work had little influence on the social relations of respondents.

The human aspect appears, however, very different in Zimbabwe, where relations with colleagues are reported unsatisfactory by 15 per cent of those surveyed, but where the social relations at the shop floor with supervisors, managers and directors are not cordial at all: more than half are not satisfied with relations with the supervisors, and two thirds of the respondents were not satisfied, very dissatisfied or not satisfied at all with management and directors, thus bitterly marking, presumably, the racial divide in that country.



*Personnel policy and workplace management*

High degrees of dissatisfaction are again observed when personnel management is reviewed. Grading and promotion are the target of great discontent and, probably related to that, education and training opportunities offered by the employer (see Table 5.10). Baah suggests that many respondents feel frustrated since grading, promotion and training opportunities are determined without consulting the employees and thus form a unilateral management prerogative (Baah 2000, 56).

**Table 5.10 Dissatisfaction with personnel management and workplace management (Percentages; N = 8551)**

Percentage of respondents who are 'dissatisfied', 'very dissatisfied' or 'entirely dissatisfied' with ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... personnel management in general	75	64	46	25	n.a.	74	75	n.a.
... grading	n.a.	79	62	73	66	n.a.	68	75
... promotion	n.a.	81	63	65	n.a.	82	80	60
... education opportunity	n.a.	73	66	63	55	69	68	n.a.
... disciplinary procedures	n.a.	61	32	39	43	50	53	41
... workplace organisation	n.a.	65	35	39	33	62	45	2
... availability of equipment	n.a.	51	56	66	45	75	58	45
... maintenance of equipment	n.a.	51	50	64	50	n.a.	59	41

n.a. signifies not applicable (categories not used)

Sources: see Table 5.1.

Many respondents (often more than half, see Table 5.10) were also not satisfied with the current situation of workplace management. For instance, 66 per cent in

Mali, 56 per cent in Tanzania, 51 per cent in Zimbabwe and 45 per cent in Guinea (2) were dissatisfied with the availability of the machines and equipment which they needed for their work. Similarly, about half of the respondents were dissatisfied with the state of maintenance or repair of these machines and equipment. In many instances, workers in these countries had to grapple with old and defective machines in order to sustain minimum levels of production, but often received all the blame for low productivity. The results of case studies in Tanzania and Ghana have amply portrayed how breakdowns or cuts in production due to old-fashioned machines could undermine productivity and thus be a threat to job security. Perhaps more importantly, the implicit criticism of personnel policy and workplace management shows how much the respondents are concerned with how the workplace fares. They, as partners at the workplace, have a stake in its good management: in the end, their employment depends on the continuity of the firm.

## **Conclusion**

The survey of the conditions of work and employment of the respondents in the APADEP survey in seven African countries shows a grim picture. It is true, the big majority of the respondents are satisfied with their work (or rather, with the fact of having a job at all) and with the good human relations at their places of work. But as far as satisfaction goes, this is all. On the whole, the trend of the APADEP survey is one of general dissatisfaction and discontentment over the full range of working conditions.

Economic crisis and structural adjustment have put into question a number of gains and rights obtained in the past (a secure job, openings to training and advancement and so on), and all these achievements are now called obstacles to 'flexibility' (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 40). 'Unemployment constitutes a serious threat to democracy and stability because employment bestows on individuals dignity and self-esteem without which the establishment of a viable democracy and for that matter a democratic culture cannot be achieved', comments Baah on the Ghana survey (Baah 2000, 43). One can broaden this conclusion: how do bad working conditions (sanitary, hygiene, transport, canteen), high discontent with personnel policy and workplace management, and a wage or salary that is far too low to care for oneself and one's family, relate to self-esteem, dignity and democracy? Indeed, as the Mali study concludes, the improvement of economic and social conditions, of the management of the workplaces and of the economy, necessitates new approaches to enterprise and work organisation. To be sure, more trade union and worker participation are called for (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 43).

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## Chapter 6

# The Trade Union Condition

This chapter will investigate the trade union situation and condition in the countries where APADEP questionnaire research was conducted. The trade union situation differed considerably from country to country, historically and currently, in structure and in functioning. The chapter will therefore begin by sketching briefly the history and actual trade union situation in the countries where the questionnaire survey was conducted: Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.<sup>1</sup> The main part of the chapter will examine the conditions under which the trade union representatives and activists in these countries operate.

### The Trade Union Situation in Seven Countries

#### *Burkina Faso*

Burkina Faso is the only country among the seven here under review which has known trade union pluralism before and ever since independence. Trade union history was described in various publications<sup>2</sup> and may be summarised as follows. Trade unionism had developed quickly in the 1940s and 1950s, often as an extension of French trade unionism, and the trade union plurality and orientation of the 'metropolitan' unions of the colonising country was replicated in three major national trade union federations and a number of autonomous unions, ranging from reformist to revolutionary, the latter the most combative (Silga 1997, 148–9). Various coups d'état brought revolutionary rule to the country and the dictators decided to rely on a newly created mass movement for 'the defence of the revolution', rather than on the ideologically divided unions, which were marginalised until the 1990s. By then seven major national trade union federations were in place (CGTB, ONSL, CNTB, CSB, UNSL/FO, USTB and UGTB), plus 86 autonomous trade unions, most of them distrusting each other and not willing to form common platforms or adopt unity in action (*ibid.*, 163–6). The only exception to this was the APADEP project which extended to all national trade union federations except UNSL/FO, and these federations constituted amongst them the Supervisory Committee of the project,

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1 An earlier APADEP publication, *Trade Unions and Sustainable Democracy in Africa* (Kester and Sidibé 1997), provided ample information on this subject for ten African countries, including five countries under review in this chapter: Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali and Tanzania. The reader is referred to this publication for further information; in this chapter only a brief sketch will be given.

2 See Muase 1989, and Silga 1997, 147–71.

so that the respondents in the questionnaire surveys are affiliated members of all participating federations.

### *Cape Verde*

Trade union history in Cape Verde was the subject of an earlier APADEP publication<sup>3</sup> and falls in the mainstream post-independence experience of so many African countries: under one-party rule only one trade union federation was allowed until multi-party democracy was established in the early 1990s. UNTC-CS was for a long time the only trade union under the single political party. It broke away from the single party a few years before multi-party elections took place, declaring itself autonomous and amending its constitution accordingly. A rival trade union federation, CCSL, was founded in 1992 (Best 1997, 173–205). The APADEP survey-seminars, even when organised for UNTC-CS affiliated union members in the first place, were open to other participants as well. The respondents who were unionised were 87 per cent from UNTC-CS and 13 per cent from CCSL (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 48), which roughly reflects the membership proportions of these two federations.

### *Ghana*

The history of Ghana's trade union movement is on record in several publications.<sup>4</sup> The Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) has long been the major national trade union federation in Ghana. The other main national trade union organisation was and still is the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), a highly successful organisation, operating independently. These trade union organisations all had a problematic relationship with various political regimes, in particular with the military dictatorship under Rawlings, and kept a low profile on political matters. After the openings to multi-party democracy and the farcical elections of 1992 the trade unions began to openly reassert their rights to promote the interests of workers, including filing complaints against the government at the ILO in 1993 (Adu-Amankwah and Tutu 1997, 207–28). GTUC has been able to establish itself as an independent federation in the course of the 1990s, seeking consistently to be consulted on labour matters by government, but otherwise not entering politics. In recent years GTUC was threatened by a split within, when one of its affiliated national unions threatened to break away from GTUC. At the time of writing (2006) the outcome of these developments was not yet clear. The APADEP seminars where the questionnaire surveys were conducted were organised for the members of the 17 national unions affiliated to the GTUC, but were also open to members of other trade union organisations.

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3 Best 1997, 173–205. A more recent account of trade union history may be found in an APADEP trend study on the history and present situation of the Cape Verde unions in Monteiro 2001.

4 The result of an APADEP trend study is published in Adu-Amankwah and Tutu 1997, 207–28. Other publications of interest are Panford 1994 and 2001. An overview of the present structure of GTUC may be found in Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000.

## Guinea

Under Sékou Touré one single trade union existed, the CNTG (National Confederation of Guinea Workers), under the tutelage of the single political party, the PDG. Soon after Touré's death in 1984 and in the subsequent liberalising and democratising context, CNTG became autonomous.<sup>5</sup> In 1991 a new Constitution was adopted by Guinea's Parliament, in which also freedom of association was assured in keeping with ILO standards. This opened the door to union pluralism and, dissatisfied with the CNTG which was found to be leaning towards the government in place and generally inactive, three main other federations have sprung up in the past ten years: the ONSLG, founded by a person who was defeated in a CNTG election; the USTG, organising six breakaway national unions of CNTG in one federation; SIFOG, a breakaway from ONSLG; and UDTG, another CNTG breakaway. The Guinea researchers comment that a climate of suspicion, distrust and hostility reigned between the five federations, but that trade union pluralism was a necessary evil to break through the continuing political dependence and lax attitude of the CNTG (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 36). Later, under pressures from the workers, these different federations started to co-operate in an *Intersyndicale* [inter-union platform] for specific purposes. Today, the trade union landscape features six trade union federations (the five mentioned already plus UGTG), a split that has weakened the movement in terms of representativeness, trust and efficiency. Yet, on certain occasions unity of action is sought, like a joint declaration at the occasion of the 1st of May (*ibid.*, 37).

In the first seminar-related questionnaire survey (Guinea (1)), all respondents either belonged to CNTG which was then the only trade union organisation or stated they were not trade union member or did not know (37 per cent), probably due to the fact that automatic check-off of all employees in public service made for an unclear situation. In the second seminar-related questionnaire survey (Guinea (2)) the majority of the participants were from the USTG, the organising union. Twenty two per cent of the participants belonged to other federations (as an open door policy was followed) and 18 per cent stated they were not trade union members.

## Mali

Mali has for a long time had a major single trade union federation, the UNTM, under party tutelage but not quite as stringent as in many other African countries.<sup>6</sup> Two other national unions existed, SNEC and FEN, organising teachers in rivalry to a national teachers' union affiliated to UNTM. In the second part of the 1980s the union was going a more and more independent way, and in fact became the

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5 The trade union history of Guinea in the Sékou Touré epoch was described in Diallo et al. 1992, 38–40. For more recent developments (until 2002), see Baldé et al. 2001a, and Dopavogui et al. 2003, 28–39.

6 See Sidibé, Sissoko and Coulibaly 1997, 229–51. See also Coulibaly et al. 2000, Chapter 2, for an overview of the Mali trade union movement and its place in the West African context during and after colonial times.

major actor in overthrowing Moussa Traoré by calling a successful indefinite general strike to bring down his regime. In view of that the trade union was a highly respected organisation (its Secretary General became the country's vice-President) and was seen as the champion of Mali's now emerging democratic process. In 1996 however, an unresolved conflict at the UNTM Congress led to a split, and later to the establishment of a rival trade union federation, ONSLM, headed by one of the candidates contesting the UNTM leadership. The respondents in the survey are all members of the 12 national unions affiliated to UNTM, as the survey was conducted when ONSLM had not yet come into existence.

### *Tanzania*

Tanzania had a flourishing trade union movement before independence and in the period following.<sup>7</sup> But eventually, the single political party, CCM, forced the unions to be brought under one umbrella, creating JUWATA, a mass organisation of workers fully integrated into the party. JUWATA enjoyed considerable material support through subsidies from the party and the government, and through an effective check-off system was able to increase its membership and create a more or less efficient infrastructure of communication, education and organisation throughout the country. Yet already in the 1980s claims for independence from the Party began to be heard and a process was set in motion which was to last several decades, to finally establish an independent, autonomous trade union organisation. The many steps in this process are well-recorded.<sup>8</sup> Before the adoption of a multi-party political system in 1991, OTTU (Organisation of Tanzania Trade Unions) was established through an Act of Parliament, after deregistration of JUWATA in 1990. Even when OTTU was established 'from above', it was not affiliated to any political party, and was supposed to form industrial unions. It eventually established 11 sector-based national trade unions and changed its name (in 1995) to TFTU (Tanzania Federation of Free Trade Unions). In 1998 a new Trade Unions Act came into force which repealed all previous structures and provided for freedom of association, allowing workers to establish trade unions of their own choice and to draw up their constitutions and rules and elect their leaders. It was also stipulated that two or more such trade unions might create a federation of unions. In 2001 the 11 unions formerly affiliated to TFTU formed a new federation to comply with the new legal provisions: this was the TUCTA (Trade Union Congress of Tanzania). In the research conducted under APADEP, the OTTU situation applied.

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7 See Chambua 1997, 287–315, and Chambua 2002, Chapter 2. The latter publication gives a detailed description of trade union structure from workplace to national level (*ibid.*, 114–19).

8 Chambua 2002, 34–40 and 110.

*Zimbabwe*

A range of publications describe the development of the trade union movement in Zimbabwe.<sup>9</sup> In pre-independence Zimbabwe, trade unionism was very splintered and divided on racial lines. Upon independence the ZANU party in power manoeuvred the setting up of one single national trade union federation, ZCTU, in 1981 and tried to bring it under party tutelage. But scandals and gross mismanagement characterised the party-loyal leaders in the 1980s (Schiphorst 2001, 59–89), and eventually the union constituency brought *bona fide* trade unionists into power in the 1988 ZCTU Congress. The new Secretary General, Morgan Tsvangirai, started to professionalise the union and to mobilise other young leaders to follow a more independent trade union course. ZCTU became fully autonomous and started to challenge the Mugabe administration, for instance with an alternative development plan (ZCTU, 1995). ZANU attempts to assist in setting up a rival national trade union federation in the early 1990s failed. Trade union unity was safeguarded, but government denied ZCTU a role as social partner (*ibid.*, 91–139). Lately, like in Zambia earlier, ZCTU started to turn against the political system of the Mugabe administration, and Tsvangirai left the union and entered the political arena to contest Mugabe's leadership. The APADEP studies in Zimbabwe were conducted in the period 1991–95, when ZCTU 'developed from an angry young man to an autonomous social partner' (*ibid.*, 138), and all questionnaire respondents are ZCTU affiliated.

### The Trade Union Condition: Questionnaire Survey Results

#### *General information on the trade union representatives and activists*

As mentioned in the description of the questionnaire sample in Chapter 4, the APADEP survey conducted during seminars was in principle addressed to trade union representatives. This objective was by and large obtained, but a number of footnotes must be placed. The seminars were to respect minimum quotas for women, and in countries where women were not (yet) trade union member in large numbers, non-representatives or non-unionists were admitted to the seminars and filled in the questionnaires. But also, in general, considerable numbers of persons were active in trade union work and representing unions without formally being trade union members. This may be explained as a consequence of the transition from automatic membership and check-off under previous one-party systems to voluntary membership and payment of union dues under the growing democratisation of politics and unionism. Thus, it was proposed in Chapter 4 to describe the sample as consisting of 'trade union representatives and activists'. There is a striking difference between countries. In countries where trade unionism was well-organised over a longer period of time, only a few respondents stated they were not trade union members. In Guinea (1), Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Ghana, between 96 and 100 per

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<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive overview until the situation in 2000, see Schiphorst 2001, 59–139.



cent of the respondents stated they were trade union members. In Mali and Burkina Faso the number of union member respondents is around 80 per cent, and in Guinea (2) and Cape Verde less than 70 per cent (see Table 4.2 in Chapter 4).

**Table 6.1 Duration of trade union membership (Percentages; N = 8551)**

Percentage of respondents who were trade union members ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... less than 5 years	64	51	26	33	27	41	53	75
... 6 to 10 years	21	30	20	18	23	30	47	
... 11 years or more	11	14	54	37	50	29		25

Note (1) In Burkina Faso and Guinea (2), no other specification is available.

Note (2) In Cape Verde the categories are slightly different: up to 4 years, 5 to 9 years, and 10 or more years.

Percentages do not all add to 100 because some answers missing or unclear.

Sources: compiled by the author from APADEP survey reports: Diallo et al. 1992 for Guinea (1); Makanya et al. 1993 for Zimbabwe; Chambua 2002 for Tanzania; Coulibaly et al. 2000 for Mali; Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000 for Ghana; Reis and Rodrigues 2003 for Cape Verde; Kaboré 2006 for Burkina Faso; Dopavogui et al. 2003 for Guinea (2).

Respondents were often relatively new to the trade union movement. In Cape Verde 71 per cent of all respondents had less than 10 years' trade union membership; only 3 per cent had more than 20 years. The researchers find this a satisfactory development; 'it brings fresh blood into the movement' (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 49). Also in Guinea (both in the first and the second survey more than 10 years later) and Burkina Faso, the great majority of respondents had less than 10 years' membership. In the more 'established' trade union movements the sample consisted of many experienced trade union representatives: in Ghana 50 per cent and in Tanzania over 50 per cent had been trade unionists for over 10 years, in Mali 37 per cent (see Table 6.1). The Ghana researchers comment that in their country this should not be a surprise as this is at least in part due to the 'check-off' system: length of trade union membership corresponds with length of employment (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 61).

Not surprisingly, both Ghana and Tanzania also report the highest number of trade union officers among the respondents: 74 and 84 per cent respectively. In the other countries this is much lower; in Cape Verde 52 per cent of the respondent trade

union members state they do not hold a trade union office, in Burkina Faso 46 per cent, in Guinea (2) 42 per cent. The Guinea (1) and the Tanzania studies report a rapid turnover of trade union representation. In Tanzania, where the percentage of respondents with a trade union office was highest (84 per cent), the median duration of holding such an office was one to two years, and only 2 per cent of the respondents had held a trade union office for more than 20 years (Chambua 2002, 120). In Cape Verde 64 per cent of the trade union office-holders had held this post for less than four years (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 50). These turnover figures seem to indicate that many if not most of the grassroots trade union representatives hold their office only once or twice and thus are relatively inexperienced, entailing risk of a lack of institutional memory.

It should be remarked that at national level the situation may be different. This questionnaire study extends to the grassroots. The Ghana study reports that of the 74 per cent trade union office-holders in the sample, more than 70 per cent did not hold offices at district and/or national level, thus confirming that indeed the majority of the respondents in the survey were local and grassroots representatives: ‘... their views and perceptions on trade union issues at the local levels should, as a matter of fact, provide valuable insights to trade union policy makers towards the shaping of the movement and the way forward in general’ (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 93).

It is assumed that grassroots trade union representatives are in general more qualified than the workforce as a whole they represent. This should be normal: they are often elected to leadership because of their competence. But are they aware of the problems of workers in general? The Guinea (1) study probed into this question. The researchers conclude that the workplace and local representatives are clearly better educated and trained than the average worker: almost 80 per cent of them hold staff functions, mostly in state or public service, and only two in ten are manual workers but typically skilled rather than unskilled. They thus assure high-quality representation, but how representative are they for the employees they represent? A social mobility research shows they are more representative than first meets the eye. Over 80 per cent of these qualified representatives come from families of, in the majority, farmers and unskilled workers or unemployed. So these representatives are the first to climb on the social ladder whilst their brothers and sisters remain members of a class of farmers and (mostly unskilled) labour. Moreover, practically all representatives declare (see previous chapter) that they take part in side-activities together with other members of the household. This implies, the Guinea researchers conclude, that the representatives, whilst better qualified, are well aware of the problems of the workers as these problems affect themselves also (Diallo et al. 1992, 42–4).

### *Trade union election procedure and trade union democracy*

Trade unions are often called ‘agents of democracy’. They have struggled for independence, and decades later were main mobilisers to remove undemocratic governments. What is the state of democracy within trade union structures? Table 6.2 shows wide disparities in the way elections for trade union officers at workplace

and local level are conducted. In Guinea, Burkina Faso and Mali, between 70 to over 80 per cent of shop floor elections are 'by show of hand' or 'by acclamation', whereas in Tanzania 63 per cent of representatives are elected by secret ballot, 54 per cent in Cape Verde, and 40 per cent in Ghana.

**Table 6.2 Procedure applied for grassroots election to trade union position (Percentages; N = 8551)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Secret ballot	5	29	63	5	40	54	14	9
Raising hands	69	49	27	75	39	27	59	69
Acclamation	14	1	-	10	4	2	15	-
Appointment	11	19	5	9	8	13	12	9
Other	1	2	5	1	9	4	-	13

Sources: see Table 6.1.

In Guinea (1) the scarce use of secret ballot (even when the trade union statutes prescribe it as the election procedure!) is explained as a residual habit from earlier one-party state practice when 'raising hands' or 'acclamation' were used to verify if the chosen candidates of the ruling party were supported by the electorate, and to identify non-conformists (Diallo et al. 1992, 50). When asked what preference they had, one third mentioned 'secret ballot' (*ibid.*, 51). Yet, between 10 and 15 years later, the second Guinea study reports that only 9 in 100 representatives are state as being elected by secret ballot (see Table 6.2). In Mali information on election procedures was obtained for all levels of the trade union structure (workplace, local, regional, national and federal) and the 'secret ballot' was practised only up to 5 per cent at all these levels. The researchers are surprised by this result and conclude that independent choice and freedom of expression, necessary for democratic elections, are not guaranteed in this way (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 29). Both Guinea and Mali have known a long period of unitary trade unionism under one-party control and perhaps the above-mentioned Guinea (1) conclusion on residual practice also holds for Mali. In Burkina Faso multi-unionism has prevailed since independence and political control was not as ideologically top-down as in Mali and Guinea. Yet, in Burkina Faso the situation is not much different: 86 per cent of the respondents came to office by acclamation, raising of hand or by appointment, only 14 per cent by secret ballot (see Table 6.2), but in the survey 44 per cent stated they preferred the latter procedure (Burkina APADEP statistics).

In Cape Verde, Ghana and Tanzania, 'secret ballot' was the most frequently used procedure, and 'secret' and 'open' ballot together was used in 80 to 90 per cent of the

cases (see Table 6.2). In Ghana, the good majority (64 per cent) stated they preferred the secret ballot method of election. In all countries around 10 per cent came into trade union office by appointment, or as stated by the Ghana researchers, ‘... were curiously in office by appointment’ (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 71).

When in some countries election procedure is much more democratic than in others, there is, except in Tanzania, little knowledge about mechanisms to recall an elected representative from office, or to withdraw a mandate in between regular elections. Reliable data are available for five countries. In Tanzania 54 per cent state they know the procedure (to pass a vote of non-confidence, to remove a representative from office), in Ghana this is 32 per cent. In Mali 56 per cent state they do not know, or state there is no such procedure, whilst the remainder state that such control can only be exercised during the next regular elections (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 31). In Guinea (2) 92 per cent either do not know, or say there is no such procedure, or say there may a procedure but they do not know what it is. The remaining 8 per cent say that control is possible by following the activities and results of the representatives but still do not know the appropriate procedure (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 78–9).

The quality of internal trade union democracy should be an agenda matter of great concern. The lack of access to the statutory trade union documents governing election procedures (see later section in this chapter) may explain the continuation of stubborn residual undemocratic election practices. The unavailability of trade union statutes to large numbers of members also opens up possibilities for manipulating elections and undermines accountability, and consequently may constitute a source of weakness for the trade unions.

### *Trade union legitimacy and ambition*

The respect that both management and workers are felt to have for trade union representatives (‘trade union legitimacy’) is believed to be high in almost all countries studied. Around 70 per cent or more of the representatives in all countries felt well respected as trade unionists by fellow workers while respect felt by management was also high: not less than 88 per cent in Mali, 66 per cent in Cape Verde, 64 per cent in Ghana and Tanzania and 61 per cent in the first survey in Guinea, 59 per cent in the second survey in the same country (see Table 6.3). Conspicuously, only about one fourth of the respondents (28 per cent) in Zimbabwe felt respected by management staff, which could be due the sharp racial divide in that country.

In several countries trade union representatives reported victimisation. In Ghana not less than 11 per cent declared they had suffered victimisation. The reasons they gave were: ‘being vocal and outspoken as well as fighting for the rights of the workers’ and the forms of victimisation meted out to them included ‘... transfers, not being recommended for promotion, suspension, withholding of salaries, wage freezes, being made redundant, arrest and detention ... being prevented from attending trade union education programmes’ (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 73).

By far the majority of the representatives in all countries studied want to stand for new trade union elections and seek to occupy higher trade union positions (over 80 per cent, in Ghana and Zimbabwe as many as 91 and 96 per cent respectively).

They are also eager to be delegates to the congress of the national confederation (see Table 6.4).

**Table 6.3 Respect for trade union representatives? (Percentages; N = 8551)**

Respondents feel trade union representatives are respected by ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... fellow workers	72	73	89	94	74	85	63	69
... management	61	28	64	88	64	66	52	59

*Sources:* see Table 6.1.

**Table 6.4 Ambitions of trade union representatives (Percentages; N = 8551)**

Respondents wish to stand for ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... workplace TU elections	86	96	88	80	91	82	82	91
... national TU elections	63	95	91	77	93	95	90	n.a.

n.a. signifies not available (category not used)

*Sources:* see Table 6.1.

Many respondents explained why they were so eager to retain their position as a representative or to get such a position. The most recurrent reason was in the order of 'to defend the rights of the workers', to protect workers' rights and social justice, etc., or, more romantically, 'for love of the trade union movement', as some Guinean respondents declared (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 77). Other motives reported in the Cape Verde study include: capacity building, conflict resolution, defence of freedom of rights, solidarity, to re-organise the trade union structure, as well as for personal motives (Reis, and Rodrigues 2003, 54). In Ghana the reasons for trade union ambition were analysed separately for trade union office-holders and non-office-holders. The latter produce a wide range of reasons: to be more informed of issues of interest, opportunity to move to a higher office (political ambitions?!), secure a better public image and status (and ego!), financial gain, the need to acquire knowledge, to share experience, to protest, to exhibit good leadership quality

(Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 77). Indeed, it proved to be a mixture of wanting to serve in the trade union movement as well as wanting to use this movement as a jumping board for other (personal) aspirations. Those holding a trade union office already mentioned 'defending worker rights' most of all (some 56 per cent), and other reasons include:

To promote trade unionism and help achieve goals of trade unionism, to ensure good relationships between workers and management, to acquire good leadership qualities, to ensure workers' participation in decision making, to share knowledge and experience, to ensure that information and awareness filter to the rank and file, to work towards increased productivity, to get women's issues properly addressed, to ensure solidarity and co-operation among workers, to ensure proper organisation of workers and to encourage membership drive.

The Ghana researchers conclude:

The overwhelming desire and aspirations towards holding a trade union office or higher trade union offices as well as assuming greater trade union responsibility demonstrate a high degree of ambition and enthusiasm on the part of the worker representatives. The challenge of the labour movement is to ensure that this enthusiasm is translated into concrete action (*ibid.*).

#### *Trade union activity at workplace and local level*

In the APADEP survey a number of questions were asked about the activity of the trade union representatives at their place of work or at their immediate local level. In all countries studied, information was collected about the time allocated by trade unionists to their work as representatives, and in a number of countries the research probed further into the quantity and quality of trade union action. The results of these investigations produce the following picture.<sup>10</sup>

The Mali researchers argue that the assets of trade unions not only consist of the strength of membership numbers but just as much of the time and efforts invested by the trade union activists. Tables 6.5 and 6.6 provide the rough indication of time allocation by workplace and local trade unionists to their representative work. What strikes the eye immediately is that a large proportion of trade unionists do not spend any time at all on trade union work, either at their workplace, or back home. For those who spend time on trade union work, this is typically less than two hours per week, and only some ten per cent (with variation per country, but not so significantly) spend more than two hours per week on trade union activity. It should of course be noted that this is self-provided information, and that reality may be well below the self-declared time allocated to trade union work, as it may be expected that respondents will tend to overrate rather than underrate their contribution.

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<sup>10</sup> Information in this section refers to Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 63–6; Chambua 2002, 121–2; Coulibaly et al. 2000, 26–8; Diallo et al. 1992, 47–8; Dopavogui et al. 2003, 77–82; Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 51–3; Kaboré 2006, 40–1.

**Table 6.5 Time devoted per week to trade union work during working hours (Percentages; N = 8551)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
No time*	34	48	21	50	9	78*	70	42
Less than 2 hours	36	40	43	36	47	18	20	30
3 or 4 hours	15	7	11	5	8	2	6	20
5 hours or more	15	3	11	4	14	2	3	8
Full time	n.a.	2	14	5	2	n.a.	1	n.a.

\* includes not applicable, 'no answer' and 'don't know' in Cape Verde.

n.a. signifies not applicable (category not used)

Sources: see Table 6.1.

**Table 6.6 Time devoted per week to trade union work outside working hours (Percentages; N = 6591)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
No time*	na	67	36	36	36	82*	56	43
Less than 2 hours	na	23	39	42	44	14	21	32
3 or 4 hours	na	5	10	12	11	2	11	16
5 hours or more	na	5	15	10	9	2	12	9

\* includes not applicable, 'no answer' and 'don't know' in Cape Verde.

na signifies not available

Sources: see Table 6.1.

In some countries, a possible explanation of low workplace trade union activity may be the refusal of the employer to use working time for that. Coulibaly et al. explain that in Mali, the trade union representatives are not authorised to use time for trade union matters during working hours, so that meetings, spread of information, education, etc., have to be organised during intervals and after working hours (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 27). And this is despite current Mali labour legislation which stipulates that trade union representatives can use working time for trade union business. In this spirit the Guinea researchers wonder why 43 per cent of the respondents state they do not devote any time to trade union work, even when current labour legislation authorises them to spend two hours per week on trade union work

during working hours (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 81). It is true that in Guinea, Tanzania and Ghana, where trade union work during working time is permitted, more time is spent on it than in the remaining countries of the survey, but it does not make much of a difference. When the Mali researchers conclude that trade union work apparently is a 'marginal activity' (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 27), Chambua states that 'one can conclude that the degree of commitment to trade union work is low for the majority of the respondents'. He adds that the majority also spend little time on trade union duties outside working hours, as time is needed to help the other household members in all sorts of activities to make ends meet (Chambua 2002, 122).

For those who are active in trade union work, what are the most important activities they perform? Where research into this question was undertaken, the major activity by far appears to be organising, attending and running trade union meetings and conferences (Ghana, 40 per cent; Cape Verde, 53; Tanzania, 55; Guinea, 62). Other major activities mentioned are grievance handling (Tanzania, 41 per cent), membership mobilisation drives (Cape Verde, 26 per cent), education (Tanzania, 16 per cent, and often mentioned in other countries as well), collective bargaining (Ghana, 9 per cent). Other activities mentioned, but much less frequently, were counselling, welfare matters, organising women, dispute settlement, providing information to workers, etc.

In view of the low amount of time spent on trade union work it is not surprising that a considerable proportion had no activity to mention. In Tanzania 13 per cent of the respondents could not list any activity and, says the researcher, 'even when this percentage may seem small, it is a bit queer taking into consideration that we are dealing with elected worker representatives' (Chambua 2002, 121). In Ghana the percentage came close to 22 per cent.

They could not tell what activities they performed in their union. Majority of these were not leaders or office holders in their workplace unions and therefore could not identify themselves with any specific role or activity performed in their union. This could be an indication of the lack of delegation of authority and functions within the local trade union structure. This often leads to a situation where some local union leaders have arrogated to themselves all the functions and responsibilities of the union and hence become typically overburdened with union work with some even becoming despotic in conduct and outlook (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 64).

The Ghana research also probed into the trade union meetings, the main trade union activity. The main issues raised during such meetings reportedly were wages and salaries (13 per cent), and a large number of issues mentioned much less frequently (less than 4 per cent): worker-management relations, working conditions, investments, attendance of meetings, membership dues, recruitment of workers, transport, education and training, productivity, collective bargaining, strategies to defend workers' rights, end-of-service benefits, hire purchase scheme of workers, promotions, and election of officers (*ibid.*, 65).

In Ghana, workplace or local trade union committees met more than 12 times a year in 1 per cent of cases, every month in 10 per cent, every two months in 60 per cent; 30 per cent could not tell. The Ghana researchers conclude that the frequency of trade union meetings is low against the backdrop that often there are many issues



that concern workers at their workplace that warrant urgent redress. Furthermore, they cannot but conclude that many of the workplace unions have become dormant or are not functioning at all (*ibid.*). In Guinea (2) the picture is not much different: 33 per cent were not able to tell when the last trade union meeting took place, 14 per cent said that there were no such meetings in the past three months, and another 14 per cent thought it was somewhere in the past 12 months (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 79). Forty per cent could not mention any particular subject discussed during such trade union meetings. 'A trade union organisation that holds no meetings, the researchers conclude, is not alive' (*ibid.*, 80).

### *Information*

To what extent are trade union representatives informed about their organisation and, in particular, about information of crucial importance to their trade union work? In the surveys, information was collected on three major dimensions in this respect. First, how much do the respondents know on the general state of trade unionism and their trade union; then, do they have access to the major trade union document, the trade union constitution and statutes; and third, to what extent do they have access to texts of labour legislation?<sup>11</sup>

To assess the degree of general information on the trade union the respondents were asked whether they knew the name of the secretary general of the national federation of their trade union, as well as that of the secretary general of their national union and district and local union respectively. Using this rough indicator, the information provided suggest that the respondents appear quite well informed about the general state of their trade union. Except for Guinea, more than two thirds of the respondents could list the correct name of the federal trade union leader, even up to 94 per cent in Tanzania (see Table 6.7). In all these countries the top trade union leader appears to be better known than the leader of the national union and of the leaders at lower echelons. This should not be surprising as TV, radio and newspapers give prominence to the overall trade union leader rather than to others. Yet, this should also appear to imply that trade unionists are often only superficially informed about their organisation, according to the Ghana researchers (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 69), except in Tanzania, where information on leadership is relatively high for all levels. In Guinea a different picture emerges. Information of this kind was already low in the first survey (51 per cent knew the name of the top general secretary); this percentage dropped to 38 per cent in the later survey, and this latter study shows that here the names of the district leaders are better known. The researchers conclude that this is probably due to the invisibility of the national leaders and bitterly state that 'the trade union leaders are more ready to undertake missions abroad than inside the country; they may leave tens of times per year abroad without making a single trip inside their own country' (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 85).

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11 Information in this section draws on Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 67–9; Chambua 2002, 123–4; Coulibaly et al. 2000, 31; Diallo et al. 1992, 45–6; Dopavogui et al. 2003, 84–5; Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 52; Kaboré 2006, 40–1.

**Table 6.7 Information available to trade union representatives  
(Percentages; N = 8551)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Have personal copy of TU statutes	n.a.	28	42	21	30	n.a.	n.a.	18
TU statutes available at TU	n.a.	60	57	31	26	n.a.	n.a.	22
Have personal copy of labour law(s)	n.a.	n.a.	29	n.a.	12	n.a.	3	n.a.
Labour law(s) available at TU	n.a.	n.a.	28	10	8	n.a.	10	n.a.
Information on TU leadership*	51	84	94	67	69	69	22	38

\* Indicator used: whether or not the respondent knew the name of the Secretary General of the Trade Union federation.

n.a. signifies not applicable (categories not used)

Sources: see Table 6.1.

In general, many respondents claim to keep themselves informed on trade union developments by reading newspapers, journals, books, trade union papers where these exist, and listening to radio. In Ghana and Tanzania, reading the trade union paper is very popular: 69 and 85 per cent respectively say they read the trade union newspaper regularly. In Guinea (1) (45 per cent), Cape Verde (47 per cent) and in Tanzania (84 per cent), respondents state they listen regularly to the existing trade union broadcast. Moreover, in countries where information was gathered, respondents often read newspapers, books and other documents on trade union issues. But does this self-reporting not present too rosy a picture? The Ghana researchers ask themselves how it is possible that the majority of the respondents claim to often read and listen and consult *The Ghanaian Worker*, but apparently lack even the most basic information on crucial trade union and labour issues on which these news media report (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 68).

The remaining information collected in the survey on trade union information would give a lot of support to the latter sceptical remark made by the Ghana researchers. The representatives often did not have access to, or knowledge of, the most basic trade union documents. The percentages of representatives stating they had a personal copy of the trade union statutes were: Tanzania 42, Ghana 30, Zimbabwe 28, Mali 21, and Guinea (2) 18 per cent. Those who responded that their union branches had a copy were 57, 26, 60, 31 and 22 per cent for Tanzania, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Mali and Guinea (2) respectively (see Table 6.7). Since having a personal

copy and having one available in the trade union committee often overlapped, it appears that (except in Zimbabwe) at least half of the trade union representatives did not have access to the statutes of their own union. In Cape Verde 50 per cent stated they knew the constitution of their trade union (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 32).

Lack of access to documents of crucial importance is even more striking with respect to labour laws. Where information is available, between 90 (Mali), 80 (Ghana) and 70 per cent (Tanzania) of the representatives do not have access to a single piece of labour legislation. In Guinea (2) 76 per cent have no information whatsoever on existing labour legislation and another 10 per cent do not respond. Only 8 per cent know of the *code du travail* [the general labour law], 4 per cent know of the Civil Service Statute and 2 per cent mention other labour legislation (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 84). In Ghana 17 per cent had some idea about one or two labour laws, 8 per cent knew something about the Workmen's Compensation Law, 6 per cent could mention the Industrial Relations Act, and 1 per cent the Social Security Law. Over 90 per cent of the respondents had no access to a single piece of labour law – whether by way of personal copies or by way of official copies placed at the local trade union office. 'This state of affairs naturally constitutes a serious indictment on the labour movement as a whole. This is even more so when the majority of the respondents are direct trade union representatives albeit at the local/workplace levels' (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 67).

Trade union strength grows with the ability to negotiate conditions for and represent the interests of the workers as well as handle grievances, through procedures that are recognised and established by law. Lack of knowledge about labour legislation constitutes a major weakness that obstructs trade unionists from being familiar with their rights and the necessary procedures for dealing with employers and public authorities. It also undermines trade union ability to contribute to the consolidation of the rule of law or to take or support the necessary initiatives that lead to enabling legislation for trade union existence and activity. Without access to or appreciation of the place of the law in trade union practice, union activists are left to rely only on intuition and tradition in finding their way forward.

### *Trade union resources*

To function properly trade union workplace and local committees need certain basic resources. For this research three such possible conditions were selected: (1) an office or a room or any other facility where trade union records could be kept and meetings held, (2) a means of transport for trade union errands, and (3) a budget, however modest, to pay for trade union functioning and action. Did the respondents find such conditions in their trade union environment? Tables 6.8 and 6.9 show the extent of availability of such basic resources that are vital for the work of local trade union structures in the countries studied.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Information based on Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 69–70; Chambua 2002, 122–3; Coulibaly et al. 2000, 28–9; Diallo et al. 1992, 49; Dopavogui et al. 2003, 79–80; Kaboré 2006, 39–40.

**Table 6.8 Resources available to trade union representatives  
(Percentages; N = 8053)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Have TU office	25	66	55	34	29	n.a.	24	11
Have TU means of transport	8	23	8	22	6	n.a.	14	11
Have TU budget	8	59	25	33	n.a.	n.a.	32	12
Have other TU resources	18	38	15	52	16	n.a.	28	n.a.

n.a. signifies not applicable (categories not used)

Sources: see Table 6.1.

**Table 6.9 Number of resources at disposal of trade union representatives\*  
(Percentages; N = 7013)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
None	58	22	32	57	61	na	na	65
One	28	20	41	30	24	na	na	25
Two	8	29	19	9	10	na	na	5
Three	4	20	5	3	3	na	na	4
All four	2	9	3	1	2	na	na	1

\*Considering the 4 resources mentioned in Table 6.8, namely: office, transport, budget, other.

na signifies not available

Sources: see Table 6.1.

Apart from Tanzania and Zimbabwe the (great) majority of the local/workplace union committees had no place to keep trade union records, correspondence, minutes of meetings, archives, or to meet or to have consultations with aggrieved workers. When it comes to a means of transport and to a budget, the picture becomes even grimmer. And where other resources were mentioned, respondents said it was their goodwill, their devotion, their moral support, or making available their own bicycle, motorbike or car, etc. Also contributions by others were mentioned. Indeed, in Guinea (1) it is reported of trade union structures in large enterprises like mines, plantations,

large industrial plants and government departments, provisions were made by the employer to equip the trade union. A trade union committee in a privatised mine was given a computer. To an extent such donations were a residual practice of the past when the state was owner and it subsidised workplace party-related trade union structures. In such cases the obvious danger is increased dependence on the employer.

But overall, the grassroots trade union work has to be done without any or only one or two material resources in most cases (see Table 6.9). The Mali researchers, reporting that 57 per cent of the representatives have no resource whatsoever, 30 per cent only one and 13 per cent two or more, capture their information under the label *La fortune du pauvre* [the fortune of the poor]: ‘... is trade unionism in Mali practised under a tree, living on alms and begging?’ (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 28). The Guinea researchers wonder whether the disappointing amount of activity (see section above) cannot simply be explained by the absence of even the most minimal resources (Dopavogui et al 2003, 79).

Obviously, the key of the problem is lack of any funds. What then happens with the membership contributions? An explanation on flow of trade union funds is given for Ghana, probably valid in several other countries as well. By the ‘check-off’ system, members’ dues are deducted at source and paid directly to the national unions to which the workers belong. By constitutional arrangement, however, 20 per cent of these dues are paid back to the local unions which constitute their operational budgets. Another 30 per cent is paid to the federation, 50 per cent is kept by the national union (Adu-Amankwah and Kester 1999, 70). But it would appear that in many cases the percentage due to the grassroots never reaches there. Especially when unions are losing members as a result of retrenchment and when check-off systems are waning in several countries, representatives may continue to find themselves virtually without resources – mostly no funds, no means of getting around, and no office in which to keep trade union documents.

In many case studies, trade union committees complained of absence of support from trade union structures at higher levels. Striking was the case of a Guinea perfume factory where a file with letters to the National Union or to the Confederation was shown – all letters unanswered. The lack of trade union communication from bottom to top looms large also in the case studies of Tanzania and Mali. Management on the other hand, appeared to benefit from the lack of resources of local trade union committees by making them dependent on its generosity, and thereby creating a rift between members and leaders, as is suggested in three case studies in Tanzania and Guinea (see Chapters 7 and 8).

### *Trade union education*

What are the chances for worker representatives and activists to receive whatever short training or education is available to gain or upgrade their skills for trade union work? The survey reveals that trade union education and training was very weak at

all levels.<sup>13</sup> For the majority of the respondents, except in Tanzania, the APADEP seminar was the first trade union education that they had received at workplace or local level. Also at other levels, only a minority took part in educational activities (see Table 6.10).

**Table 6.10 Trade union education/training enjoyed by trade union representatives (Percentages; N = 8551)**

Enjoyed TU education/training at ...	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... workplace/local level	21	46	63	30	46	66	30	23
... district level*	25	50	36	33	37		37	28
... regional level*			23		35			
...national level	16	55	12	12	22		25	18

\* District and regional levels are differently defined from country to country; in most countries only one intermediate level between workplace/local and national were considered.

Sources: see Table 6.1.

The implication is that most of the workers who are elected as trade union representatives or act as trade union activists in their places of work have never received any trade union training or education. Where education was available, it was typically in the capital cities and in places where large numbers of trade union members are concentrated, like industrial or mining sectors, instead of being evenly spread over the country. But typically, in the non-urban and non-industrialised parts of the country, trade union representatives had no access to trade union education or training.

In Tanzania, where the record is by far the best in comparison to other countries, 63 per cent reported to have received some trade union education, and 34 per cent even more than once. Despite this relatively favourable picture, the researchers comment that it is an 'astonishing result' of the research that 37 per cent of the respondents never received any trade union education (Chambua 2002, 124). What then to conclude about the other countries! The Tanzanian APADEP team decided to conduct a case study to investigate the effectiveness of the trade union movement with regard to training and education. This study shows that, except for the teachers'

13 The following section draws on information provided in Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 73–5; Chambua 2002, 124–8 and 131–2; Dopavogui et al. 2003, 86–8; Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 52–3; Kaboré 2006, 42–3.

union, there was no adequate programmatic approach to trade union education, and again the key problem encountered was funds: all national unions as well as the federation depended on funds provided by donor organisations for the bulk of their educational activities (*ibid.*, 125–8). Thus it is not surprising that these activities were supply-driven rather than demand-driven.

It must be noted that the thirst for education was sky-high among the respondents. This was the experience throughout the experience of APADEP's education programmes. The number of persons wanting to take part in its various seminars and workshops was normally much higher than places available. In some cases, like in Guinea in 1986, police assistance was even needed to 'protect' the 40 officially registered seminar participants, with a hundred of eager candidates pushing at the entrance door (from field notes). The survey results show that what these grassroots representatives want most of all is basic information on trade unionism, trade union and worker rights, trade union finance, and only then on more practical matters like collective bargaining, participation, negotiation, employment contract, and so on.

Lack of education remains a major weakness of the trade union movement. It weakens the bargaining position of the trade unions as they seek the enhancement of working conditions and the capacity of representatives to play a significant role when opportunities for participation exist. It also creates a feeling of inferiority and low self-image among worker representatives.

## **Conclusion**

Trade union structures differed widely in the countries studied. In Zimbabwe and Tanzania, workplace trade union committees are the strongholds of 'grassroots' trade union representation. In Guinea, local trade union committees composed of representatives from all different branches play the key role. In Mali and Ghana, both structures are important. In some countries, it is the confederation which plays the main role at national level, in others it is the national industrial unions. Some trade unions have a long tradition; others are relatively new. And the last decade has witnessed a change from trade union unity (though mostly politically enforced) to multi-unionism. In view of such rather important differences and changes it is not easy to generalise. The survey was conducted among over 8,000 grassroots trade unionists and elected trade union representatives spread all over their respective countries, who filled in questionnaires during seminars. It is the 'trade union base' that speaks out here. The questionnaires results allow one generalisation: whether at workplace or at local level, in vertical or horizontal structures, in traditional or newly created unions, trade unionism was seldom strong.

The most heart-warming finding is that the ambition to be actively involved in trade union work is sky-high. The great majority, mostly more than 90 per cent of the respondents in the survey, are eager to be involved. But the problems are many and complex. As was reported earlier in this chapter, questions of internal trade union democracy and building a democratic culture within the movement is simultaneously a fight to break with traditions of monolithic party control of the past, and also an apprenticeship in coming to grips with a pluralist political environment. Perhaps

it is fair to say that the trade union movement in Tanzania had best overcome this transitional episode, through a long process of restructuring and restructuring again. Over 90 per cent of its elected people got their position through secret or open ballot election, and over 50 per cent were aware of procedures to control and, if necessary, recall elected office bearers. Countries coming nearer to Tanzania in this respect are Ghana and Zimbabwe. Yet the Ghana researchers state:

Lack of knowledge and information about trade union representation procedures arising from non-availability of trade union constitutions and statutes to a sizeable proportion of members may partly be the reason for some of the anomalies related to elections and the tenure of officers. It may also explain some of the undemocratic practices that characterise trade union elections particularly at the workplace level. Despite the imperfections that characterise election of officers in trade union office democratically, the fact that the majority recognised elections as the best means by which people should assume trade union office is a pointer to the fact that favourable perspectives about trade union democracy exist among trade union members. Besides the apparent diffusion of democratic practices within trade union organisation and activities at the grassroots level in particular as captured by this survey gives a stream of hope as far as the search and the development of a lasting democratic culture in Ghana is concerned ... it provides the grounds for drills in the art of democracy (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 71–2).

The francophone counties Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea would appear to be lagging well behind. In the latter three, democratic procedure within the trade unions leaves very much to be desired.

Furthermore and reported for all countries, striking features are the relative inactivity of a large number of representatives and activists, the only superficial information they have of trade union procedures, and the painful but almost generalised lack of knowledge on labour legislation. Trade union democracy, activity, information and competence can only be hoped to increase through education and by making available other resources, and this in the end is a question of finance.

Education is indeed a priority activity according to the respondents, indispensable in order to develop and strengthen trade union activity, in view of the low degree of knowledge on even the most basic information on trade unionism, on labour law, etc., on the functioning of internal union democracy, on rights to time and other resources to conduct trade union business. This shows that workers themselves have identified that lack of training and education is crucial for trade union development, strength and power.

But resources are very limited indeed. Overall, less than one in ten respondents stated their workplace and local committee had a place to meet, a means of transport and a budget. Others had two or at least one of these basic resources at their disposal; many, and in several countries most of the respondents, stated none were available at all.

In the end it all boils down to funds, and the membership contributions are simply too modest to meet the cost of adequate representation of worker interests. Also here past trade union history plays a role. Under one-party or military regime conditions, trade unions received important subsidies or facilities, paying for this with the currency of loyalty to the regime in place. Trade unions are now independent of party



and regime, which is a major achievement, but subsidies are no longer provided, and facilities withdrawn. Moreover, in a number of countries, trade union pluralism has implied that the already meagre membership contributions are needed for the functioning of several if not many competing trade union federations, and this at a time when trade union membership figures are falling as a result of privatisation and structural adjustment combined. Decline in trade union membership due to retrenchment under structural adjustment necessarily leads to decline in trade union funds. The Ghana researchers comment:

[Funds are not] adequate to meet the increasing needs of organised labour and the constant challenges it faces. It was very evident from the survey that one major constraint impeding trade union organisation and activity at the local levels was finance and this contributed immensely towards the distressed situation in which most of the local unions found themselves. The decline in trade union membership over the last one and a half decades due to public sector reforms under SAP have had serious consequences for trade union finance. Dwindling memberships means dwindling volumes of union dues and inadequate resources to finance the unions. In a situation like this there is a high tendency for trade union stands to be compromised (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 70).

It is indeed in Ghana that a wide range of activities exists to add to trade union income. Some local unions run transport businesses, invest in agriculture, in treasury bills and government bonds, and run services such as filling stations, car washing bays, shops and photographic studios. At the federation level, the Ghana Trades Union Congress runs the Labour Enterprises Trust, which mobilises investment capital by floating shares to workers, which in turn are invested in profitable ventures known as labour-owned companies (*ibid.*).

This financial penury will be difficult to solve. The trade union initiatives in several countries to create income additional to membership contributions are heart-warming but it must be wondered whether they will lead to a structurally different trade union income pattern, one with a critical mass. From the various national reports it shows clearly that most trade union activity is captured in projects run with foreign donor money. In the concluding part of this book, in particular in Chapter 12 on trade union policy, these challenges will be picked up.

## Chapter 7

# The Struggle for Workplace Democracy in Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Ghana and South Africa

In the introductory part of this book it was described in brief how democratic participation was given shape in a number of African countries under post-independence mobilising regimes, and how privatisation had affected the position of workers and their trade unions. In many countries workplace democracy was exercised as part of trade union structures, combining bargaining and grievance handling with participation in decision making. Sometimes it happened in more or less ‘casual’ forms of participation, like management-initiated participative management, government-induced health and safety committees, frameworks of consultation agreed to by management and unions – or indeed a combination of all these. In a few countries workplace democracy was more structured, with statutory rules and regulations defining rights and duties of the parties involved, prescribing procedures to follow, and defining the ‘status’ of the decisions eventually reached. Where this was the case, the participatory institutions had been introduced by erstwhile mobilising regimes.

How and with what success have these forms of worker participation been practised? Chapters 7 and 8 will report on the accumulated research data gathered in nine African countries. In the present chapter the practice of informal and more or less unstructured worker participation and of trade union participation will be reviewed by means of case studies in Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Ghana and South Africa. The next chapter will summarise the case study results in Zambia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe where statutory or legal forms of participation existed or are still operational.

In the countries reviewed in this chapter workplace democracy was not formalised and consisted of a wide range of practices, from ad hoc meetings to more or less regularised structures where workers were given opportunities to participate in workplace decision making, directly or through representatives. Such participation was, in several countries, channelled through trade unions and consisted of trade union influence in decision making in the margins of collective bargaining, and representation of worker interests through trade union committees at the workplace.

The case studies here presented were exploratory. Which more-or-less formal forms of worker or trade union participation existed? What role was played by the trade unions? How meaningful, democratic and effective were the various forms and practices of ‘voluntary’ participation? The case studies extended over a time

span of almost 20 years: the first were conducted in Togo in 1985, the last in Guinea in 2001. In the presentation of the learning experiences in the six countries studied the time sequence of the studies is not used as a guideline but rather the similarity of types of experiences. First are the francophone countries, Togo, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, with their emphasis on 'responsible participation'; then the case studies of Ghana which focus on privatisation; and finally the cases reported for South Africa, which are the most structured ones and thus logically lead on to the cases on statutory workplace democracy reported in Chapter 8.

### **Experience in Togo**

Some first brief exploratory case studies were conducted in Togo in 1985: in a beer brewery in Lomé, a sulphate mine in the east of Togo, a hotel and a machine factory in Lama Kara, and a local government office in Dapaong in North Togo. The studies explored the relationship between trade union representation and 'responsible' worker participation. The mainstay of trade union organisation and action appeared to lie at local or community level rather than at enterprise level. At the workplace, workers elect their representatives, the *délégués du personnel* (henceforward referred to as worker delegates) who may be unionised as well as non-unionised workers. These two frameworks of worker representation functioned more or less independently. The study concluded that the worker delegates did not meet the expectations and the hopes of the workers. There was evidence that they were often put in the role of 'shock absorbers' between workers and the employer, easily influenced by pressures from management to behave in the interest of the company. These delegates did not receive support from the trade union structures which operated at another level. Conversely, the representatives of the trade union were not much aware of the problems of the worker delegates so that the problems arising at the level of the enterprise could not be represented at higher levels of trade union action and representation. The apparent consequence was that the worker delegates were operating in an isolated way and had hardly received any information or education on how to play their roles. They were not supported by a forceful organisation which could assist them to claim participatory rights or better facilities to perform their participatory functions. Worker education carried out by the trade union in various programmes (the single Togo Trade Union Federation, CNTT, had four active Worker Education Centres in different parts of the country) were addressed to trade union representatives at the level of local administration, rather than directly to elected worker delegates in the enterprises.<sup>1</sup>

### **Experience in Mali**

In many francophone African countries the key notion of labour relations was 'responsible participation'. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this notion was amply used

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1 The Togo case studies were reported in summarised form in 'Rapport soumis au Bureau Executif de la CNTT par le groupe des chercheurs', in PADEP 1985b, 59–61.

by one-party regimes to seek the co-operation of trade unions in a 'responsible' way – that is, in the interest of the country, and thus in the interest of the party. There had been long protracted pressure by the single Mali Trade Union Federation, UNTM, on the single political party and Mali government to give more scope and content to this concept of 'responsible participation'. The UNTM had accepted the policy since 1974, but with a warning: it was not prepared to support participation as a manipulative means of raising productivity.<sup>2</sup> At its Third Congress it resolved that 'participation does not imply simple dialogue, just now and then consultation, but real participation, by giving workers more power in controlling enterprise management' (Dicko et al. 1985). In the late 1970s, under pressure from the World Bank and the IMF, government had announced it was going to privatise all bankrupt state enterprises. When the first privatisation waves started to affect Mali, the UNTM could not agree that state or public enterprises would simply be turned over to private owners. With reference to the concept of responsible participation, UNTM argued that such firms should rather be turned over to the workers themselves, with the help of the trade unions.

#### *The case of EMAB, a furniture company*

UNTM wanted to test this policy out on one company, the state-owned furniture enterprise EMAB, which had been in difficulties since its foundation in 1962 and was bankrupt by 1979. UNTM started to negotiate with government to take over the ailing enterprise and the government was prepared to give worker self-management a chance as a test case for an alternative to privatisation of the public sector. An inter-ministerial commission was set up, including UNTM representatives. The commission went on a study mission to Algeria and Yugoslavia to study the self-management structures in these countries, and proposed a draft statute for workers' self-management in Mali. In 1981 the green light was given for the EMAB experiment, using the draft statute as a basis, but inserting a 'transitory' period to gain experience, eventually to be followed by real self-management. When, in 1985, APADEP educational activities were conducted in Mali, UNTM solicited the co-operation of the Ecole Nationale d'Administration [the National School for Public Administration] to carry out a case study of this experimental worker self-management firm in Mali.<sup>3</sup>

The transitory format laid the control of EMAB in the hands of a management committee, composed of the elected trade union officials in the enterprise. The enterprise trade union leader became the enterprise director. He attended a weekly meeting of all state enterprise director generals, which accentuated the role of the state as owner.

In interviews it appeared that most workers did not have a clear idea of the composition or power of the management committee, nor were they aware of the state enterprise meetings of their trade union leader, even when they were apprehensive that he was answerable

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2 See the extensive description of the evolution of UNTM's views on 'responsible participation' in Dicko et al. 1985, in particular 34–40.

3 The full report on this case study may be found in Kester and Sidibé 1986.

to the state rather than to themselves. One of the workers said: 'The trade union used to defend workers before management, currently the trade union defends management before the workers.' The trade union leader/director general stated he felt very much embarrassed by this double accountability. He felt that neither the Ministry or the workers understood him and that his position was impossible. The trade union had initiated self-management in EMAB and claimed all participation roles, as it wanted to avoid a double channel of representation. This impeded the functioning of self-management. The trade union was involved in a system which depended to a large extent on government, so that the trade union lost its ability to protest independently.

In group interviews with all workers of the firm it appeared that, nevertheless, they wanted self-management to continue. More than 90 per cent wanted to keep self-management, even in its experimental form. They explained they felt more respected as people, better consulted, better informed of the enterprise problems. Some said what they liked particularly was the lack of arbitrariness. Despite this favourable attitude, the workers and most of the elected trade union members of the management committee appeared to know little about participation or self-management, workers' management or trade union roles in a self-management structure. Apart from the general director, his deputy and one executive manager, nobody else had had any training or education in workers' self-management (Kester and Sidibé 1986).

Eventually, the enterprise did not make it, also not in economic terms. The important lesson to be learned was the necessity of political, financial and social guarantees before starting a self-management experiment. Workers wanting to take over a public enterprise in difficulty need to have guarantees for financing, ensure access to markets and benefit of professional management. They should also avoid becoming a waste-paper basket for failed state enterprises.

Another conclusion was that trade unions should have involved themselves much more in the search for solutions to problems arising from such experiments. A major role was played by the trade union when initiating a self-management policy as part of its general policy to prevent unemployment under privatisation. But in the follow-up, the trade union had not rigorously pursued the experience of self-management. Four weaknesses were particularly evident. First, the trade union did not monitor the evolution of economic problems so it could not seriously discuss these with government. Second, there were no periodic evaluations during the transition period and this prevented the development of a sound policy of self-management based on experience. Third, the trade union did not to introduce any programme of worker education, or training of those directly involved in participation – the elected members of the management committee and the executive managers. Finally, the idea of self-management under 'responsible participation' remained too general. Ever since the idea had been launched in 1974, no evaluation of experience was made though necessary to guide trade union action step by step. Thus, in the end, workers no longer understood the purpose of new frameworks. The defensive attitude of many trade union leaders was alarming (Kester and Sidibé 1986).

The political situation in Mali changed drastically in 1991 when the single political party and its government were evicted and an opening for a democratic political system was created. The UNTM had played a major role in the uprising against the old regime. It rejected its policy of *responsible* participation, which it now wanted to

be *democratic* participation. In consultation with UNTM, ENA researchers conducted (between 1992 and 1994) several more workplace case studies in Mali. The first was a study of a battery company, SOMAPIL, a private enterprise in the industrial area of Bamako, employing some 300 workers. The second was a study of various small-scale enterprises (a privately owned bakery, a co-operative dairy products factory and a public telecommunications firm) in Mopti, some 600 kilometres east of Bamako. This case study of Mopti also included a study of the local and regional trade union committee as well as of six women's and youth organisations, so as to assess labour relations, trade unionism and worker participation in interdependence. The third study concerned a parastatal cotton and cotton oil estate, HUICOMA, with a head office in Bamako, and two plants in respectively Koulikoro and Koutiala, some 100 kilometres south of Bamako. In all these case studies the main aim was to examine the effectiveness of democratic worker participation and to examine the role of the trade union therein.

### *The SOMAPIL case*

The Société Malienne des Piles Electriques (SOMAPIL) was publicly believed to be a successful enterprise, and one of the research objectives was to assess to what extent success was due to the nature of the labour relations in the company. The summary findings and conclusions are outlined below.<sup>4</sup>

As in many other Malian enterprises, the trade union committee had been seen as in the service of the management under 'responsible participation' policy. The trade union committee was dissolved after the transition to democracy in 1991 and was replaced by a 'crisis committee', in which 12 workers were elected by open ballot (raising hands). Many of the members of this crisis trade union committee were also worker delegates. The new committee was not a success: it was not consulted on enterprise management, and relations between management and workers' and trade union representation worsened after 1991. Workers were not represented on the board of directors, so that all policy decisions as well as the daily management of the enterprise were strictly in the hands of the director, his account manager (both expatriates) and the personnel manager. The worker members of the crisis committee had only a slight knowledge of how the enterprise was structured or administered, and had no education or training for their representative roles. Increased pressure from the worker side to get involved in management matters caused a bad social climate in the firm. The researchers concluded there was a participation void in the enterprise and that, certainly, there was no correlation between the economic success of the firm and the quality of its labour relations. There was no formal structure allowing participation in decision making so that the interviewed workers believed participation would be beneficial to the enterprise, but management and director did not share this view, so participation simply did not take place. Trade union radicalism (hard demands without concessions) after the 1991 events found an echo among the workers, but it appeared no one knew how to tackle the situation. This shows the

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4 The full report of the case study may be found in Coulibaly et al. 1992.

consequences, the researchers conclude, of the lack of information and education on what trade unionism and participation are about.

### *The Mopti case*

The Mopti case study may be summarised as follows.<sup>5</sup> Labour relations in the bakery were dominated by family control: half of the 18 workers were family members of the private owner. This created an atmosphere of frustration and distrust among the non-family workers. They had no written employment contracts, working conditions were poor, and there was not a single inkling of worker representation or participation. The workers did not know anything about the financial situation of the bakery. In the dairy products factory the situation was not much different. At the telecommunications firm (the PTT) the working climate was better, but workers had no access whatsoever to decision making at the workplace. The local trade union committee had no influence in these enterprises.

After the 1991 uprising the workers in Mali had high expectations for improvement of their lot. The case study in Mopti leads to the conclusion that the local trade union committee was in a state of disarray (absence of any resources) and could not respond to the worker expectations. But the regional trade union committee played, eventually, a forceful role when the results of the case study were made public and were submitted to the enterprises and the parties involved. The bakery dismissed the non-family workers for having given embarrassing information to the researchers in the interviews, and the post office had started to investigate who among the women interviewed had reported sexual harassment by management. The regional trade union committee intervened by putting pressure on the local authorities to redress this situation. The bakery workers were re-instated and the investigation at the post office was stopped. But the structural problem was more difficult to solve: the trade union lacked any infrastructure (information, availability of legal documents, education and training in trade union roles, etc.) and had to fall back on the good contacts with the administration (appointed under the one-party system) in order to achieve some results.

### *The HUICOMA case*

HUICOMA was at the time of study generally considered as following 'best' practice in labour relations in Mali, and this case will be more extensively reported here.<sup>6</sup> HUICOMA was Mali's single biggest enterprise, comprising three units: a factory at Koulikoro, one at Koutiala, and a head office in Bamako, employing altogether some 900 workers, and outsourcing a number of activities like security. The enterprise was doing well economically, and the workers were well paid in comparison to others in the same type of employment, and this was mainly the result of many extras, premiums, incentives, etc., which could easily double the basic wage or salary.<sup>7</sup>

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5 The full report of this case study may be found in PADEP 1993.

6 The full report of this case study may be found in Sidibé et al. 1994.

7 See Chapter 5 for a description of the many extras paid to HUICOMA workers.

Otherwise, working conditions were often bad: exposure to chemical hazards, inadequate equipment and clothing, 24-hour production in three-shift rotation and, for many, a sense of lingering employment insecurity (Sidibé et al. 1994, 1–24).

The main channels of worker representation were the trade union committees and the worker delegates (*délégués du personnel*). And the main structures of worker participation were the committee for the management of the social fund, the health and safety committee, the management committee and the board of directors on which a worker representative had a seat.

In each of the three main sections of HUICOMA an autonomous trade union committee was elected from the unionised workers in the respective sections. These trade union committees had been newly elected after the 1991 uprising, to replace the ancient state-inclined union committees. Many union representatives not trusted by the workers had been ousted. The company had invested in the new trade union structures to help them in their functioning. In both factories the union was given an office (as regulated in the labour law), and the company also had offered a start-off fund (the equivalent of around €600<sup>8</sup>) to get the new-style union going. Apart from that, the company contributed to a ball evening organised by the union (approximately €800) in each of the two factories. The other trade union income consisted of a 5 per cent contribution from the social fund (see later) and the check-off union contribution (Sidibé et al. 1994, 24). ... The trade union committees claimed to meet every month, adding extraordinary meetings when necessary. However, the researchers could find only the minutes of three trade union meetings over one year in Koutiala. The trade union committees, in the euphoria of the new democratisation, made a number of new claims. It wanted a housing committee and, when this took off, a housing policy of the company, and this resulted in the allocation of plots of land to 115 workers. The union also demanded and obtained a system of incentive payments for production, and a credit scheme for the purchase of food and other items like motorbikes, television sets, etc. (*ibid.*, 25–6).

The relations between management on the one hand, and trade unions and worker delegates on the other, were conflict-ridden. The union committees on the three different sites operated separately but when meetings took place with the estate's overall management committee (to which the union was invited for consultations), the secretaries general met in advance to prepare a common stand. If these three union leaders wanted to meet, they could successfully request management to finance such a meeting. The union committee members further stated that before management 'they were always confronted with a *fait accompli* ... management does not accept that HUICOMA consists of bosses as well as workers, and does little to involve the workers or their representatives in the management of the company' (*ibid.*, 26). It appeared from the minutes of the trade union meetings, however, that several suggestions were taken up by management.

A second channel of worker representation consisted of worker delegates, provided for in the labour law but only effectively introduced in HUICOMA after the 1991 events. The worker delegates were elected by all workers, unionised or not, from all workshops. These delegates operate on their own initiative and represent worker grievances and demands

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8 These and following statements on euro amounts are calculated on the rate of exchange of the CFA (the interstate West African currency) to the euro as it stood at the time of publishing and takes into account the 1994 CFA devaluation.



as these come up. According to labour legislation, these delegates were entitled to some material support from management to exercise their duties, and they were supposed to meet every month and keep minutes of their meetings. The researchers could not find any records of such meetings (*ibid.*, 29). There was animosity between the worker delegates and the members of the trade union committees. According to the delegates, the trade union believed that the worker delegates were a counter-force to the trade union, and according to the trade union office holders the delegates went beyond their mandate. The rank and file workers on their part appeared to feel associated to the worker delegates rather than to the trade union committees. They stated they believed that the trade union representatives were corrupted by management. At the Koutiala plant the workers said: 'it is the worker delegates who are our own people' (*ibid.*, 30). In this perspective it is interesting to learn that the trade union was against organising general assemblies of all workers, arguing that such meetings disrupt production too much, and this was explained by the workers interviewed as a move by the trade union committees to keep all information to itself (*ibid.*, 25).

Apart from the representation by trade union or by worker delegates there were four other specific arrangements for worker representation at HUICOMA: the social fund management committee, the health and safety committee, the estate management committee and worker representation on the board of directors. The enterprise places 5 per cent of its profits in a social fund which was used to assist workers with contributions for costs of marriage, baptism, funerals, etc., as well as a fixed contribution to health care. Each unit had its own management committee of the fund, on which the majority of members were workers elected in an assembly of all workers. For the three estate units together the fund was controlled by a supervisory board consisting of four management representatives and nine worker representatives (three delegates of each fund management committee). The trade union had three observers on the supervisory board. Again in each of the three units there was a health and safety committee consisting of management and worker representatives (the study does not specify how these are elected or appointed). The workers were aware of the existence of the committee, but did not see any action or result. The trade union (not represented on the previous two committees) provided the sole worker representative on the management committee of the estate, composed in majority of management representatives, with the trade union secretary generals of the three plants representing the workers. The minutes of the trade union committee indicated that the management committee was an important channel of participation where a number of trade union suggestions for production improvement were accepted and implemented. Finally, the trade union had one representative on the board of directors, who in the view of the workers could do little on his own (*ibid.*, 31–4).

Striking in the HUICOMA case is the competition of two types of worker representation: through the trade union or through directly elected workers. The interviewed workers were apprehensive about what went on within the trade union committees, but did not have adequate information. Tensions existed within the trade union structures where elected members tried to defame other members as part of their electoral campaign, to the extent that in the Koulikoro plant, several members left the trade union committee and tried to organise a rival committee (*ibid.*, 25). The 'confrontation' between the two representative systems focused in particular on the credit system for worker purchases. Introduced at the union's request, it brought most workers in great problems as eventually, some found 70 per cent of their wage

deducted for debt servicing. The trade union then wanted to limit the scheme, but the workers mobilised their worker delegates to defend the system nevertheless (*ibid.*, 26). The researchers conclude that in the firm there were ‘islands of representation’ (*ibid.*, 30) that stood in the way of a synergy of participation. The role and competence of the trade union committee on the one hand and of the worker delegates on the other were well defined on paper, but lacked co-operation and co-ordination. The battle over representation was on, which as the researchers observe, management found convenient to help them play out.

The researchers conclude that the most striking shortcoming in worker representation in the estate was the lack of education, and observed the trade union committees had not undertaken any effort in that direction. Education was necessary to introduce the workers as well as the trade union office-holders and worker delegates to an understanding of their roles so they could start to learn what could and could not be realised within each of the channels of representation. Also the lack of general assemblies (as these were held from time in the other Mali cases studied) was felt to be important.

The researchers also note that worker participation could have good potential in a company like HUICOMA. In the interviews they noticed a great sense of identification with the company and an awareness that the company’s problems affected the workers as much as the owners. They were also apprehensive that a possible privatisation could endanger their employment. When during the 1991 uprising vandals threatened to pillage the factories, the workers blocked the road and defended the company. They stated they were aware of the necessity to keep the company economically viable under stiff global competition, and resented they were not represented on the budget committee and the market committee to contribute ideas. They wished they could contribute more. For instance, the company stocked many new spare parts that did not fit existing equipment because the wrong ones were ordered without consulting the workers who were better informed. They gave many more concrete examples of how they could contribute from their shop-floor experience (*ibid.*, 38–9).

## **Experience in Guinea**

During the period under Sékou Touré, public sector enterprises were heavily politicised. The key slogan of the regime was: ‘Ready for the revolution’. Committees of Production Units were led by trade union leaders as a kind of *de facto* intelligence unit of the only political party, the Parti Démocratique de Guinée (PDG), leaving managers in uncertainty about whether and when they would be corrected, reprimanded, accused, imprisoned or hanged. Assemblies of workers were often held to shout slogans and applaud visiting political dignitaries. The only tangible benefit for the workers was the provision of food at cost price. It was no surprise that the economy collapsed. In the early 1980s the slogan ‘Ready for the revolution’ was substituted by ‘Ready for production’ in the vain hope of mobilising the workforce in the public sector, which had become virtually the only sector. By then, too much was already known about what happened in the overpopulated prisons. The relief

was great in 1984 when Sékou Touré died, and with him 26 years of ‘revolutionary socialism’, leaving behind a bankrupt and disoriented nation.

The PDG was banned, as were all mass organisations. The new military regime (with Colonel Lansana Conté as the new president) liberalised, privatised and ‘restructured’ the economy. ‘Redress’ and ‘recovery’ were the new key words. Thus, Guinea could count on support for its structural adjustment plan from the World Bank, the IMF and the EU. Considerable levels of bilateral assistance, from France in particular, began to flow in. The trade union federation, the Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée (CNTG), shed off its PDG identity. It was no easy task to regain the confidence of workers, and to develop a policy of trade union action in an environment of mass dismissals in the public sector, few job opportunities for school leavers, empty state coffers and a total lack of trade union funds. Added to this, tanks in the street were continuing reminders of the Colonel’s rule.

*The case of Perfinc Ltd, a privatised perfume enterprise*

Against this grim background a first case study was conducted of a meanwhile privatised perfume enterprise. Perfinc (Perfume Incorporated)<sup>9</sup> is situated in the heart of the Fouta Djallon mountain range in Guinea, some 500 kilometres away from Conakry. It is one of the oldest companies in Guinea, established in 1928 by French colonisers. The company produces perfume mainly from *karokaroundedé*, a flower unique to the region. These flowers are picked from plants growing in the wilderness in a particular season. There is a factory to produce the concentrated extracts, and a laboratory. All products are exported to France. In 1973 the company was nationalised, and in 1984 again re-privatised under French ownership, with minority Guinean shares and a 10 per cent government share.<sup>10</sup>

The chairman of the board (French, based in France) nominates the general director, his deputy and the departmental managers. The general director appoints all employees, and calls incidental meetings as he deems fit, with one or more or all managers. The general director receives detailed instruction from the chairman of the board. Until 1989, the general director was a French expatriate; he was replaced by a Guinean (Kester 1991a).

After 62 years in existence the company had all possibilities for economic success: a completely renovated enterprise upon privatisation, a vast terrain with plantations, and trained personnel. Furthermore, its product is much appreciated on the world market. At the time of the case study, the company had 45 employees under regular contract, and more than 500 workers without a contract. There were some workers, such as guards, who had worked full-time for many years but remained officially registered as ‘daily workers’, so that the labour law did not apply to them. Most of the employees without contract were women who picked flowers and did a range of other jobs, most of it seasonal work. To them, the system of barter was applied: they received no cash payment, only rice in return for flowers or services.

9 As agreed with the company the actual name of the company is not used.

10 The full report on this case study may be found in Kester 1991a.

Most of the workers expressed great concern with the organisation of the company. For example, they were aware of the problems of petrol supply but they were very critical of the way available fuel was used. Another complaint was about haphazard task allocation, which they thought was the result of careless organisation. They often found themselves on tasks for which they had no skill, and did not complete jobs they started: 'They move us about to different places of work, there is no continuity' and 'If only we were allowed to complete entire jobs so that we can show what we are worth and get appreciated accordingly'. Workers were concerned that the company used its human resources very inefficiently, and that whatever they suggested was not considered (Kester 1991a).

Workers with a regular contract were all unionised. The trade union committee with four elected officers had an office on the site of the enterprise. It conducted a modest but efficient administrative system, and appeared very active. The labour law stipulates that the company must allow trade union activities on its premises.

During the case study, elections for a new trade union committee were due. Two regular and two alternate members were to be elected. Elections took place in the weighing hall of Perfinc, and a member of the executive committee of the CNTG chaired the election meeting. All managers (including the general manager) were present and had the right to vote because wage and salary earners at all levels of the hierarchy can be trade union members. Only workers with an employment contract took part in the election. Two military personnel were present.

There were two candidates for the regular positions, both outgoing members of the trade union committee. They were re-elected by acclamation. There were three candidates for the two remaining posts. The candidates were briefly introduced and subsequently a vote was taken by raising hands. The new trade union committee was now formed. It included two engineers, a typist and a driver. All but the typist were men. In later interviews the researchers asked for comments on the election event. It appeared that almost all agreed to the method of acclamation and raising of hands. It was judged democratic, and that it could not be done any other way because most workers are illiterate. Three people protested, suggesting that people were voting the same way as the department head for fear of being sanctioned later. 'Secret ballot elections would give another result', one said. The presence of the military had not troubled anyone and their presence was considered necessary to maintain order. Also, the presence of the management team was largely accepted, except by those who preferred secret ballot elections (Kester 1991a).

Trade union activity had three major components: social assistance, bargaining and participation. Social assistance was considered important 'because it forges a spirit of solidarity among the workers'. At occasions such as births, funerals and illnesses, the trade union demanded workers to contribute and it sought additional donations from the company. Bargaining related to wages and material benefits but when negotiating wages, the union was fighting a losing battle. Any increase was more than swallowed by inflation. Multiple interventions on arbitrary applications of the company's incentive system remained without a single success and claims for a transparent earnings structure were ignored.

No success was made in attempts to win employment contracts for the workers who had been *de facto* full-time employees for years but who continued to be treated as daily

workers, just to evade any legal obligation to them. The union leader said: 'We present our claims, it is the employer who decides, that is how capitalism works'. The Perfinc trade union committee was just as cynical about the trade union federation at national level. Letters to the national trade union and to the Confederation were shown, requesting support, suggesting bargaining agreements for the private sector, or any other form of co-ordinated action. However, no reply came from Conakry. 'We see these trade union leaders only just before the election at the next Congress' (Kester 1991a).

The most important trade union activity was participation, as its main policy was to regulate conflict through dialogue. Workers' participation was well established at Perfinc, though not formalised. In the period 1988–90 there were not less than 20 general assemblies of all workers. They were held at the end of the working day and company transport was made available to ensure participation of all employed people.

Management organised a general assembly once or twice a year and considered them indispensable for communication. They informed workers on the state of affairs of the company, on the organisation of work or on the reasons for delays in payment of earnings. The trade union organised five to six general assemblies per year. They used them to discuss, in front of management and all workers, the current problems of work and of workers. The subjects covered a wide spectrum: the organisation of work, distribution of tasks, planning of production, salary rises, indemnities, overtime work, social security procedures, establishment of a canteen, construction of sanitary provisions, installation of drinking water, improvement of safety and health at work, training of workers, regularisation of the work contracts of people who are fully employed. Everybody was free to express himself or herself, complain, make remarks and proposals. Ample use was made of that possibility.

The trade union had to ask management's permission to organise these assemblies during working time and request the company's assistance. Such requests had never been refused and, in turn, management was given opportunity to make communications. Management had also requested the trade union to hold an assembly to discuss a labour conflict. This 'invitation', according to the union, suggests that workers had more confidence in the union. The union accepted this because it could thus give direction to the meeting and control the agenda.

The trade union undertook to write a report of the assembly meetings, submitting these to management with a letter setting out claims, proposals and suggestions. Uninvited, it did the same for the assemblies convened by management. For whatever type of assembly, management considered the reports and letters as mere information, but the trade union continued to produce them as a device for its own mobilisation and for its discussions with management. The trade union wanted a dialogue with management at any opportunity and was prepared to contribute to an improvement of the organisation of work and production. Examples were given by the union of practical suggestions that helped to improve the efficiency of the workplace. The union further demonstrated its co-operative stance by asking the workers to respect the rules and regulations of the company. The union hoped their positive approach to management problems would open the door to solve workers' problems as well.

The workers said they were very satisfied with their trade union committee. They found that the trade union should continue to look after the interests of the workers and should co-operate to improve the running of the workplace: 'Where the enterprise goes well, it is thanks to the union', 'An ideal trade union committee? Ours!'. The workers hailed the general assemblies, which they found important opportunities to express themselves, to get information, make proposals, air views and ventilate criticism. Despite the ownership structure, they saw the company as their own: 'This enterprise is established on our territory, in our province, and that is our point of departure.' At the same time, they saw that almost all problems discussed at the meetings remained unsolved. Over several years the same issues came up, assembly after assembly, and nothing was done about them. Problems around drinking water, canteen, showers, health and safety protection at work, transport, and many others, had become permanent items of the meetings. The workers and the trade union concluded bitterly that there was no follow-up. The union did not have any power to change the situation, despite its untiring efforts, shown through the incessant flow of letters and reports to the office of the general manager.

According to management, workers' participation was a living reality of the company. It was satisfied with the involvement of workers, and would like to see education developed to step up the participation of workers in the general assemblies and at the place of work. However, although some workers told us that they had been consulted incidentally, most said they only carried out orders. None of them had ever had an opportunity for education, although they are eager to upgrade their skills and ready to discuss the organisation of work. 'We know our jobs better than management – consultation is a matter of our dignity – but we are only informed, not consulted' (Kester 1991a).

### *The public bus transport company (SOGETRAG) case*

Between 1998 and 2000 six further case studies were conducted in Guinea, in a transport company, an electricity company, a bauxite mine complex, a brewery, a steel plant and a banking corporation.

The bus company SOGETRAG, based on the outskirts of Conakry, started in 1985 as a parastatal enterprise with around 400 employees, expanded significantly to reach a peak in 1990 (1,100 employees and 128 buses) but deteriorated later and by the time of the case study (1999) the company had only 10 buses running with around 50 employees (Baldé et al. 1999, 1–3).<sup>11</sup> Two private French companies owned 37 per cent of the shares, and were represented on the supervisory board together with representatives of the Guinea government, the other owner. The company had started under exclusive management of expatriate directors who had the responsibility to train the new employees; they left in 1993 and from then the company was under exclusive Guinean management and control. The workers normally had an indefinite employment contract, with several advantages: medical assistance, transport from and to home and a modest family allowance. But they complained bitterly about the difference in pay between themselves and management: the highest paid manager earned 20 times more than a cleaner, and the managers had all sorts of extras to top up their incomes, including a company house. The workers declared to regret these privileges accorded to management even more as these continued despite the

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11 This section is a summary of a report by Baldé et al. 1999.

fact that the company had been rapidly deteriorating since 1991: the government did not honour its announced subsidies, no investments were made, no adequate maintenance was done.

Relations between workers and management were strictly hierarchical and in a 'dirigiste' style: there was no room for consultation. One worker said: 'The directors have very little contact with us; if something has to be done, the directors instruct the supervisors who subsequently instruct us. Whenever materials have to be ordered we are never consulted, they think they know better than us' (*ibid.*, 6).

The majority of the workers were affiliated to the trade union federation CNTG, which had an elected trade union committee on site. But relations between union members and elected representatives were not good, as many interviewed persons declared the union committee was manipulated by management. A spontaneous movement to go on strike to get salary increases was not followed up by the union committee which was put under pressure by the Minister of Transport. In 1997 many workers severed their membership to CNTG and affiliated to a rival trade union, L'Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinée (USTG) which, following negotiations with management, was invited to appoint representatives to an 'expense committee' which had to safeguard the company. Now all workers were present to deliberate on the state of the enterprise, on buying spare parts, petrol, programming the use of buses and the wages to be paid to the workers, in all transparency and taking into account the problems the company was going through (*ibid.*, 9). This action resulted in the continuity of the enterprise, be it at a much lower level than formerly.

In interviews the workers mentioned the many factors that contributed to the bad situation of the firm. Among these were cited the bad financial, material and human resource management of the enterprise which had led to laxity, excessive gratuities and corruption. At national level, there was no policy, no vision for this vital public transport facility, hence the enterprise fell victim to slow bureaucratic procedure and indifference in government circles where several persons had an interest in the failure of public transport as they themselves had stakes in private transportation. This also involved corruption at the level of the Ministry of Transport which did not carry out any inspection in the company. On top of this, the workers were not consulted in any way on decisions concerning the firm (Baldeé et al., 11).

In the end it was worker participation which gave a new lease of life to the firm. Facing unemployment, the remaining workers decided of their own initiative to get ten buses in running condition, and from the money earned they were able to pay themselves part of their normal salary. They now took decisions with all workers present, and sent delegations to the still existing company and to the government requesting them to take over the company as a co-operative (*ibid.*, 12). It is at this point that the case study ended, and it is not known what eventually happened to the company.

#### *The case of the electricity company (SOGEL)*

The Société Guinéenne d'Electricité (SOGEL) was created in 1994, taking over a failing state-owned electricity company. The new company was a partnership between the government and three foreign electricity companies. The company has

its headquarters near Conakry and runs a number of plants all over the country, with 1,700 employees (Baldé et al. 2000a).<sup>12</sup>

Labour relations in this company were described as co-operative among the lower echelons of workers, but strictly hierarchical from top to bottom. Solidarity reigned when it came to solve problems of workers (an accident, a death in a family, etc.) or when something was to be celebrated (a birth, a wedding). All contributed to a solidarity fund, and mutual help and assistance was common. Says one employee: 'Everyone in Conakry knows that when there is a problem with one of the SOGEL workers, there will be spontaneous help from the whole company.'

But 'absolute respect' was expected for the hierarchy in the organisation and top-bottom 'dirigiste' relations interfered with the above-described solidarity and produced a lot of mistrust and misgivings. The middle management employees benefited from many advantages and enjoyed employment security, whereas the rank and file workers complained they risked dismissal for the slightest mistake, without warning or procedure. Also working conditions differed sharply. Bitter remarks were made about the private toilets for the higher echelons, and the miserable state in which users of the rank and file toilets found themselves, so much so that several employees remarked they went to family nearby to be at ease. Despite many complaints, nothing was done, according to the employees interviewed. Similar complaints referred to drinking water, protective wear, equipment and so on (*ibid.*, 5).

The strict hierarchy did not leave much room for any form of participation. The only form of worker representation was through two trade unions (CNTG and USTG) who had formed a joint trade union committee to deal with management. The affiliation to the unions rested on moral support rather than on effective contribution: few workers pay their union dues. But meetings were well attended and much criticism was showered on the committee for their lack of transparency and communication to the employees. The researchers quote one interviewee:

... Most of our trade union representatives were suggested and supported by management, some even belong to them. They spy on us and report our comments to management. When a worker has problems with management they react lukewarm and often take side with management. That is why management dismisses certain workers without hearing them ... (Baldé et al. 2000a, 8).

The researchers conclude that at SOGEL the corruption and mismanagement of the former state-owned company have to be redressed. Such restructuring cannot be done by simply laying off a number of workers and creating an atmosphere of fear, but by transparency and involvement of the workforce in the decisions on the enterprise. A condition for that is that first, trade union democracy is established, that trade union representatives act independently vis-à-vis management, so that a real 'trade union culture' can come into existence which should be the basis of negotiation and social dialogue (*ibid.*, 9).

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12 This case study is reported in Baldé et al. 2000a.



*The case of the bauxite mines (SBK)*

The Société des Bauxites de Kindia (SBK) was founded in 1992 as a limited liability company, taking over from a former state enterprise. The company employs some 1,800 workers, has its head office near Conakry and the mines are situated in Kindia at some 150 kilometres distance (Baldé et al. 2000b).<sup>13</sup>

The conditions of employment and the working conditions were of the same nature as in the previous case: a sharp demarcation between higher echelon employees who had a tenured contract and non-tenured contracts for rank and file workers, and verbal or no contract for casual labour. Advantages like company houses and credit facilities applied to the first category, but pension provisions, medical assistance and social security to all workers with a contract. Company buses assured transportation. Wages and salaries were commensurate with those valid in the civil service (the state was still the main shareholder). Like in the previous case, solidarity reigned within homogeneous categories of employees, but strict vertical hierarchy and distrust were common, according to the employees interviewed (*ibid.*, 3–5).

Under previous state ownership one single party-controlled trade union, CNTG, operated in the enterprise. It retained a majority trade union membership in the now parastatal mine complex. Two other unions begun to organise workers also and formed part of a common trade union platform dominated by CNTG (seven out of nine platform members were CNTG officers, most of them managers). According to the interviewed workers, CNTG had not changed attitude, still holding that, as the company was mainly owned by the state today (as main shareholder), it was in the interest of the country that the enterprise was run smoothly.

As one worker stated: ‘Our trade union here is in favour of government, it is the first to dissuade you if you pose a problem. The union understands the financial problems of the government better than management itself, it seems. As soon as the trade union representatives sense that the workers are preparing claims, they report this to management who threaten us or make vague promises, and this stifles us. We were about to call a strike in 1997, to obtain better salaries, but management quickly made promises which up to date were not fulfilled ...’ One of the CNTG representatives reacted: ‘We are in a state enterprise; as managers we have to defend the interests of the state by priority, and also to improve the conditions of the workers. But we need industrial peace, and with the advent of new unions, we as the older and more experienced trade union should prevent upheavals. To which an group of members of opposing unions reacted: ‘The majority of the CNTG leaders are management and spy on us ... as if we are still in the old regime ... the trade union representatives are here for the interests of the government and not of the workers’ (Baldé et al. 2000b, 8).

The researchers conclude that the workers did the task assigned to them and lacked any access to participation or protest (*ibid.*, 9–12).

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13 This case study is reported in Baldé et al. 2000b.

*The case of SOBRAGUI, a brewery*

Another state-owned firm near Conakry, SOBRAGUI, was bought in 1987 by the Belgian group UNIBRA, which constituted exclusively the board of directors. Starting with some 30 employees at the time of take over, it had 169 employees in 1998. It subcontracted part of its work to a company employing 70 workers to whom SOBRAGUI did not have any legal obligation (Baldé et al. 2000c).<sup>14</sup>

The researchers describe the work organisation as rigidly hierarchical, where nobody would dare to challenge the top: ‘45 per cent of the interviewed workers were afraid to run the risk to be dismissed if they showed any disagreement with the expatriates who insist to rule as absolute masters’ (*ibid.*, 3). The rules and regulations of the company were widely published and every worker was given a copy by the personnel department. Many interviewed workers stated they were ‘working here like robots’. Physical working conditions were bad (see also Chapter 5) and work load was often dictated by the speed of production lines. Personal opinions or suggestions were not taken into account. The work controllers advised management on production matters. There was no information on the commercial and financial situation of the company, and the workers were suspicious that management had information to hide, believing profits were made at the workers’ expense.

The trade union was more adequately equipped than in the other Guinea cases. Except for two, all workers were member of USTG, which had an office with basic amenities on site, equipped with copies of the labour legislation and of trade union statutes, and generating income from sales of bags and containers. The general secretary of the union paid regular visits to the enterprise to meet the union members. Yet, the workers were of the opinion that their interests were not well-defended. ‘There is no employment security, our rights are ridiculed, there is nobody to defend us’, ‘The trade union gets no response, the absence of the State is felt and is harmful to us’, and ‘There is nobody to defend you, from top to bottom: you may find yourself without work for no reason at all. Only the (white) general manager could save you’ (*ibid.*, 12–13). The union members had stopped paying their union dues, and the trade union committee had started to sell items (mostly empty used enterprise material) to be able to function and in the hope workers would reconsider paying their dues. But workers criticised the fact that the union sold company property. This, they said, could be used by management as ‘change money’ when collective negotiations were held.

*The case of the SODEFA steel plant*

SODEFA is a private company situated near Conakry, producing various steel and iron products, mainly for construction. The company (SODEFA – Société de Développement de Fer d’Afrique) was created in 1994 and employs 225 persons and 10 Chinese expatriates. The firm was managed by a management committee consisting of 4 expatriates and 2 Guineans. The company worked mainly with temporary workers, but precise information on numbers, and also on other matters,

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14 This case study is reported in Baldé et al. 2000c.

was impossible to obtain as the researchers were considered ‘intruders’ (Baldé et al. 2001b, 3).<sup>15</sup> Most employees were ‘persons recruited at the factory gate for one day who proved solid and submissive so that they could come back for another day’ (*ibid.*, 4). The working conditions at this firm were reported in Chapter 5, and were summarised by the researchers in the case study title *Modern Slavery*. Judging from the researchers’ description, that title was not an exaggeration.

As for worker influence in decision making, the researchers state, there is a simple answer: everything was decided at the directors’ level where, in turn, it was only the four expatriate directors who decided, leaving the implementation to the two Guinean directors, as these latter two declared themselves. In group interviews workers stated they did not know how to protect themselves. The company director could just dismiss anyone without reference to whatever instance (*ibid.*, 10). Several USTG trade union representatives were dismissed after a strike, and the CNTG representatives were not trusted, especially after the donation of a motorbike to a CNTG official by management: ‘... the CNTG is corrupted by the direction, their representative is afraid to lose his privileges’ (*ibid.*, 11). In sum, the researchers conclude, there were neither negotiations nor consultations between management and workers in this enterprise, and management used the age-old device of ‘divide and rule’.

#### *The case of the banking corporation (SGBG)*

This banking corporation, Société Générale des Banques en Guinée or SGBG, based in Conakry, had a small number of very well-trained employees: 148 persons, of whom 50 per cent were trained in Paris. Five expatriates were detached by the French Société Générale to work in Conakry. The bank recruited personnel by advertisement and apprenticeship contracts and invested in further training for those who proved promising for the company.<sup>16</sup>

The bank employees were very satisfied with their working conditions and this to no surprise: a brand-new building, fully air-conditioned, with new clean washrooms, etc. The work organisation of the bank was described by one interviewed employee as ‘a pyramid in which everyone finds his place easily’ (Baldé et al. 2001c, 7). The flow of decisions was rigorously and unilaterally from top to bottom, and the salaries were calculated at the hand of ‘hierarchical coefficients’, using a points system with reference to seniority, diplomas, etc. Transport, meal and housing allowances were paid, with variations in favour of employees in higher positions. These conditions were regulated in a collective agreement between the banking corporation and the trade union (*ibid.*, 8–9). In this enterprise the trade union was affiliated to only one trade union federation (USTG).

Social relations were reported to be good across the hierarchy, but many employees regretted there was no delegation of work: it was felt the persons in higher posts did not want to delegate in fear of being threatened by more competent subordinates. The researchers concluded that whereas in this enterprise the employees were

15 This case study is reported in Baldé et al. 2001b.

16 This case study is reported in Baldé et al. 2001c.

relatively well-paid and worked under good conditions, their identity was denied by the strict hierarchical system and the lack of delegation; there were no mechanisms of information or consultation whatsoever.

## **Experience in Burkina Faso**

### *The Brakina case*

Brakina (Société des Brasseries du Burkina Faso) is a limited liability company with headquarters in Ouagadougou and with plants in Bobo Dioulasso and Ouagadougou, producing beer, ice cream, soft drinks and mineral water. The company employs some 400 employees with a tenured contract and 140 day workers. It has subcontracted gardening, cleaning and maintenance to three different companies. Work is done in three shifts (Diasso et al. 1998b).<sup>17</sup> The major trade union in Brakina is the SYNTB, affiliated to the CGTB, one of the seven national trade union federations in Burkina Faso. Seven worker delegates (*délégués du personnel*) are elected by the workforce who have weekly meetings with management for consultations. Regularly, there are general assemblies with all workers with the aim 'to promote dialogue and industrial peace in the company' (*ibid.*, 12). The researchers decided to study the functioning of trade union and delegates' participation through the analysis of three major labour conflicts in 1989, 1990–92 and 1994 respectively.

The 1989 conflict was between the SYNTB and the company directors over the removal of four supervisors and over the behaviour of an expatriate manager towards worker delegates. Relations between expatriate management and workers had been bad over the years. In the course of negotiations, worker delegates wanted to meet the expatriate commercial director to express their disagreement over the promotion of a person whom they considered had not deserved it. The delegates who tried to enter the managers' office were not allowed in and were branded 'badly educated persons'. The delegates then convened a general assembly where workers decided to go on strike, demanding the immediate departure of the commercial manager and a resumption of the negotiations. The employer in turn, demanded a return to work as condition for further negotiations, which should involve the three trade unions active in the firm, and declared that the commercial manager was prepared to offer his excuses. The two parties submitted a memorandum to the Minister of Labour, and subsequently the Labour Directorate supervised the negotiations, which led to the adoption of proposals to change the 'scaling' of several workers, an increase in transport allowance and the possibility of company loans for school education, but proposals for a housing allowance and a productivity bonus were turned down (Diasso et al. 1998b, 12–3).

The researchers, when analysing the conflict, point at the defensive and hierarchical attitude of the employer. Having failed to establish any framework of communication or consultation, the breakdown was bound to happen. The employer side stated they could not pay any more than now offered as they had incurred a loss the previous year and faced stiff competition from another brewery with the largest market share. As for the commercial manager, the employer claimed it was his and not someone else's right to

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17 This case study is reported in Diasso et al. 1998b.

appoint or remove a manager. The representatives of the Labour Directorate stated it was not up to them to control levels of wages, noting that the wage and salary structure of Brakina was above average. They re-asserted the employers' prerogative to maintain or remove the commercial manager, but appealed to all parties to think less hierarchically and strive for labour relations with more dialogue. The workers, continue the researchers, were not involved in any of these consultations or considerations. They felt they deserved part of the cake which had been created also with their labour, and found the result of the negotiations insignificant. The strangest matter in this conflict, the researchers continue, was that whereas only one trade union (SYNTB, affiliated to CGTB) was in the process of negotiations, the employer also invited the ONSL, USTB and SYNACAM to the negotiation table (*ibid.*, 13–15). The negotiation ended but the conflict was not solved.

The 1990–92 the conflict erupted again when Brakina was bought by a bigger brewery (BGI – Brasseries et Glassières Internationales) and a reorganisation followed. More than half of the workers faced dismissal, and the Ouagadougou plant was to be closed as the new investments needed to make it economically viable were considered too high. BGI informed the Minister of Labour of this decision. The SYNTB then issued a strike order, opposing the plant closure and any personnel reduction. In view of the grave consequences the Minister of State, Economic Development and Labour decided to meet the BGI president who then changed his decision as follows: the plant will close, the number of personnel in the Bobo Dioulasso plant will be increased, social insurance will be guaranteed and the dismissed workers will get a one-year salary indemnity.

The workers were informed of the decision by the political authorities and the employer, accepted the closure of the plant, but opposed the indemnity proposal. A 'minute of non-conciliation' was signed and, as the labour law prescribes, was submitted to an initial and simple arbitration procedure. The workers demanded a much higher indemnity, 30 months, and wanted to limit personnel lay-off to voluntary departure of older workers who were to be fully compensated. The arbiter of the Labour Department adopted the demands but with only 15 months indemnity. This arbiters' award was rejected by both employer and union who now asked to submit the matter to an Arbitration Council. This Council ruled it was the right of the employer to decide who was to stay in the company or to leave, that a 19 months indemnity was to be paid, and that social security payments had to be paid by the company. The workers accepted this arbitration award, recognising that the employer had respected the law at all stages of the plant closure, and had been willing to take part in all negotiations and arbitration procedures. The researchers comment that the eventual result and the worker acceptance were to a large extent due to the trade union unity all along in the negotiations, and to the more impartial position of the Labour Department (*ibid.*, 15–19).

The 1994 conflict was a follow-up of the previous one: BGI now decided to also close the Bobo Dioulasso plant, and informed the authorities. These were able to convince the employer not to close but restructure the company, although reducing the personnel. The Regional Labour Department Bureau invited three trade unions to the negotiation table: three delegates of the SYNTB/CGTB, one of SYNACAM/CSB and one of USTB. The latter two withdrew from the negotiation, in conflict with SYNTB. In a second meeting, it was the SYNTB which left the negotiation table, and announced a strike, demanding the withdrawal of the reconstruction plan as well as an evaluation of previous restructuring exercises. The negotiations now continued without SYNTB. A delegate of ONSL joined the negotiations. Several meetings followed and a partial agreement was reached, but

not involving SYNTB, the main plant union. There was unrest and physical aggression among the workers.

The Minister of Labour intervened and invited the four trade unions and the company direction for negotiations in Ouagadougou to be presided over by the Director of the Labour Department. He also requested the company not to dismiss anyone as long as the negotiations went on. Six negotiation sessions followed, much to the chagrin of CSB, USTB and ONSL who stated they did not understand why the earlier agreements were now repealed. Only at one meeting were all trade unions represented. At a meeting where only SYNTB, assisted by CGTB, was present, the employer declared to only accept the partial agreement reached earlier with ONSL and CSB in Bobo Dioulasso. Finally, a 'minute of non-conciliation' was signed, in which the employer stuck to the plant restructuring and personnel reduction and refused to evaluate earlier reconstruction exercises, but SYNTB opposed any personnel reduction and insisted on its demand for an evaluation of earlier restructuring. A few days later the employer carried out the restructuring and reduced the personnel as planned, in the presence of police forces.

Analysing this case the researchers conclude that the employer was ambivalent (from closing the plant to restructuring), not transparent (no information on the nature of restructuring) and adamant (refused to negotiate). But in particular, they believe that the lack of trade union unity had harmed the opportunities for negotiation created by the Labour Department. The unions failed to create a common platform before entering into negotiations, refused to come to meetings or walked away from them, thus turning the matter into an open inter-union conflict (*ibid.*, 19–22).

Analysing all three conflict cases together, the researchers observe that the workers had no say at all in the running of the enterprise where they work, also none on its economic position. They reason that whereas it is true that in today's context of international competition the emphasis on productivity and efficiency is logical, this does not mean that the qualitative and quantitative interests of workers should not be recognised and listened to. Only dynamics of participation in decision making can create a framework in which conflicts of interest can be under continuous review and concertation, and can integrate and interest the workers in the enterprise where they work. For the employer and the enterprise management this offers the opportunity to pursue human investment in a new spirit (*ibid.*, 23–6).

## **Experience in Ghana**

Most of Ghana's APADEP case studies were conducted at the height of the country's vigorous World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programme. The PNDC military regime of Ghana perceived privatisation as cardinal to its overall economic reform objectives. By December 2000, a total of 201 state-owned enterprises in Ghana were divested by the state. Of these, 46 had been liquidated, 96 were offered on outright sale to private entrepreneurs; in 31 other cases, part or the whole of the state's shares in the enterprises were sold; in 22 enterprises the state entered into joint venture with private entrepreneurs, and in 7 cases the enterprises had been leased to private entrepreneurs (Ghartey 2000b).

The case studies were to investigate to what extent and how privatisation had impacted upon trade union influence and workers' participation at the workplace. Six enterprises were selected as cases for study, across the main productive sectors of the national economy: the agricultural sector, extractive industries (mining and logging), manufacturing (milling, wood article manufacture and food item processing), and services (hotel business).

*The case of Ejura Farms Limited: in transition to privatisation*

Ejura Farms Limited is a capital-intensive and highly commercialised farm enterprise in the northern parts of Ghana's Ashanti region. The enterprise was established in 1969 by an American group led by Chanex International Ltd in association with the government of Ghana (60 and 40 per cent respectively). An enterprise reorganisation in the late 1970s increased the government share to 91 per cent but Chanex was contracted to manage the day-to-day business of the enterprise. By the early 1980s the partnership between the government of Ghana and Chanex ended abruptly, following alleged disagreements between the PNDC military regime and the management of Chanex. The break had serious effects on the company with production levels dipping sharply, and the labour force declined from 110 to about 65 (Ghartey 2000c).<sup>18</sup>

To stem the tide of labour unrest, the government brought in the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) to assume temporal ownership and management of the company. A new board of directors appointed a two-member management team to run the enterprise. The two managers seconded from the ADB began to actively involve the workers in the administration of the company. Workplace durbars (assemblies of all employees) – previously unknown – were held regularly (at least once a month). These durbars brought all categories of workers together to discuss issues and solutions to problems facing the enterprise. Other representation structures such as the plant workers' union, the workplace committees for the defence of the revolution (WCDR), senior staff association, management committees, etc., which were previously non-functional, became active again. These procedures fostered unity of purpose and action between workers and management who began to recognise each other as partners in the company's development. This, according to opinions expressed by the worker-respondents created industrial peace and harmony, improved output and generally enhanced progress in the enterprise.

The workers credited the interim management for providing them with the opportunity to participate in the affairs relating to the running of the enterprise. The management respected the local union leaders as well as other worker representatives as they shared ideas with them and deliberated with them on issues concerning the enterprise and themselves. The major issues discussed during the durbars were mainly those referred to it from management, the board of directors meetings, and those concerned with general problems facing the enterprise as a whole. Other issues which came up in the durbars included: management handling of worker grievances, production, welfare issues, and addiction to alcohol and smoking by some workers. 'These issues were discussed

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18 This is a summary of the case study reported by Ghartey 2000c.

freely, fairly and frankly. A level ground was created for all employees, irrespective of occupational position, to express their candid opinion. Sometimes workers were allowed to chair meetings' (Ghartey 2000c, 57–8). The workers stated that management had proven capable and effective in addressing the myriad of problems confronting the company. According to them, the new management, unlike 'the former arrogant, insensitive, and undemocratic team', was 'very effective'. This view was confirmed by management staff. In their opinion, management should take the credit for having been able to forge good relations with the workers' union through the institution of changes in their mode of operation, the infusion of new ideas, and the pursuance of innovative and pragmatic policies (*ibid.*, 54). The effects of the new work environment manifested themselves in several ways. For instance, the tides of industrial dispute, which had not been uncommon and which had resulted in acrimonious management–worker relations in the past, were stemmed. Past industrial disputes, as alleged by some segments of staff, were caused by factors such as mismanagement, discrimination against women in staff recruitment, and widely suspected selective salary increases for management staff (*ibid.*, 55).

The effects of this renewed workplace environment of active workers participation appeared to have had positive impact on productivity. The management team praised the co-operative attitude and positive role of workers towards turning around the fortunes of the enterprise which had dipped seriously in the previous years.

Ejura Farms was listed for privatisation. This kept the workers and staff of the enterprise in a state of ambivalence at the time of the study. The workers had themselves acknowledged that under current management the enterprise had chalked up tremendous successes, and they could not agree that privatisation was dictated by the enterprise's non-profitability. The plan was perceived by the workers as motivated by political rather than economic considerations. On the basis of the new lease of life of the enterprise by the new interim management team, wholly Ghanaian, the general feeling and conclusion among the workers was that the government should not terminate the tenure of the new management team but, rather, should capitalise the enterprise adequately to place it on a sound footing instead of privatising it. They registered their opposition, fearing privatisation might lead to retrenchments, victimisation and arbitrary dismissals. They appealed that they as workers be allowed to take over and run the company on a private ownership or self-management basis, paying for such acquisition over a period of time. But at the time the case study was completed, steps were taken to implement the privatisation policy.

#### *The case of the Ghana Oil Palm Development Company Limited (GOPDC)*

The Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation (GOPDC) was established by government in 1975 as a state-owned enterprise and became a joint venture company under the name Ghana Oil Palm Development Company Limited (GOPDC Ltd) in 1995. The shareholder structure at the time of the study stood as follows: SIAT (Ghana) Ltd, 80 per cent; GOPDC smallholders and out-growers, 15 per cent; GOPDC staff, 5 per cent. The majority shareholder, SIAT (Ghana) Ltd, is a joint venture between SIAT SA of Belgium (51 per cent), SSNIT (30 per cent) and ATMF (Ghana) Ltd (19 per cent). The company is managed by SIAT SA under



a management agreement.<sup>19</sup> The new owners set very ambitious expansion targets and the new management of the company introduced new ideas, techniques and approaches, aiming at increased productivity, efficiency and competitiveness. The composition of the board of directors changed in accordance with the new privatised status and in congruence with the sizes of shares.<sup>20</sup>

The effects of privatisation were judged with mixed feelings by the workforce and their trade union. GOPDC had been and still remained a viable enterprise, and available figures showed that there had been a growing correlation between privatisation and increase in profits as well as increased dividends paid out by GOPDC. But privatisation had come with severe social cost implications. The total workforce of 1,241 in 1990 declined to 679 by 1996. Retrenchment had hit the female workers particularly hard. Both senior staff and junior staff complained they were not consulted, especially with regard to the decisions on the severance award packages designed for retrenched workers. The union complained that the new management tended to prefer casual labour and contract work as against permanent employment. Management defended casualisation on the grounds that much of the work at a plantation is seasonal.

The majority of the workers who continued to work in the company felt that they were better off before privatisation. Though hours of work (8 hours maximum per day) had not changed, workload and pressure of work had increased. They also complained about the limited opportunities for training and re-training. The feeling of job insecurity was rife among all categories of employees including some management staff. But also a number of positive opinions were expressed. Procedures for grading and promotion were found fairer since privatisation and the physical infrastructure at GOPDC had improved considerably, making work much more enjoyable. There was a general feeling that privatisation had introduced better work ethics, more efficient management, improved supervision, better work organisation and improved efficiency within the enterprise (Agbesinyale 2000b, 97–8).

Workers' participation in the company was introduced by the PNDC 'revolutionary' regime in 1982 with the creation of the standing joint negotiation committee, the interim management committee, the joint consultative committee, and worker representation on the board of directors. However, already when the government began to implement the World Bank/IMF structural adjustment packages from 1988 onwards, workers' participation had begun to crumble. Yet the senior staff found itself actively involved in decision making with regard to the running of the enterprise; for example, in the regular management consultative meetings which brought together all the managers of all departments of the enterprise (also referred to as the management team). This meeting took decisions that were binding on the managing director.

Upon privatisation any worker influence on management decision making was rapidly eroded. The new management fully exercised its prerogatives, claiming the final say also on crucial issues as wages, salaries, promotions, work organisation,

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19 This is summary of a case study reported in Agbesinyale 2000b.

20 Smallholders and out-growers were also made to buy and own shares in the company.

training and re-training and profit sharing. Management argued that union representatives were often consulted within the parameters set by the collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The posture of the new management was one of aversion to any form of workers' participation. The new managing director (an expatriate) introduced labour relations procedures foreign to the Ghanaian work environment. It was suspected that such new labour relations procedures would eventually undermine the union. The managing director was said to have assumed the role of the sole policy decision maker. Both workers and senior staff respondents were not pleased with the situation (*ibid.*, 108). The only opportunity for workers' representation and potential for participation remaining were the local union and the senior staff association. But the rank and file workers had serious doubts about the union representatives' ability to stand up to management's resolve over a number of issues. There was a widespread feeling that management had succeeded in 'buying' the union leaders onto their side, and that their union leaders lacked the moral clout to defend the workers' cause. Management in turn professed to respect the union and the union leaders but union views were not accepted as part of enterprise policy. The senior staff association was in a state of uncertainty. The chairperson of the association was retrenched among other senior staff members and the senior staff appeared to have no real voice or influence at the workplace. The consultative structures in which senior staff members participated actively were all scrapped (*ibid.*, 107–8).

#### *The case of West African Mills Company Limited (WAMCO)*

The West African Mills Company Limited (WAMCO) was a cocoa processing company in Ghana's western port city of Takoradi, established by the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board (COCOCBOD) as a fully state-owned enterprise with a total of 600 employees. Between 1992 and 1994 the company became a joint venture between the government of Ghana (40 per cent) and a German company Hamster GmbH (60 per cent). The managing director was appointed by the German company. The study shows that, before privatisation, the company was economically viable despite lack of equipment and modern machinery. Privatisation had a great impact: the injection of fresh capital and capital goods revamped production by 400 per cent. The interviewed workers attributed this to the prompt replacement and repair of faulty and broken-down machines and more effective supervision (Amoah 2000).<sup>21</sup>

The consequences of increased productivity were felt by all categories of employees: their workloads were heavier than before, 25 per cent were retrenched and the remaining employees were jittery for fear of possible retrenchment which was still ongoing. Many of them lacked technical skills that could earn them alternative jobs in the event of lay-off and the company was not making any arrangements towards their re-training, thereby breeding a general atmosphere of insecurity within the workplace.

The study shows that workers' participation had declined since the privatisation of WAMCO. Prior to privatisation a standing joint negotiation committee, joint

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21 This is a summary of a case study reported by Amoah 2000.

consultative committee, quarterly durbars and various workplace committees functioned and workers took part in decision making on issues affecting their welfare and the progress of the company. There was one worker representative on the board of directors. These structures had become moribund since the privatisation of the company. Under the present management, a workers' durbar was held only once, not to discuss pressing issues between management and employees but, rather, to brief workers on policy decisions already taken by management (*ibid.*, 134). Workers were now called upon to discuss issues as and when management needed them but this was not a regular event and served to disseminate company information to the rank and file. Privatisation had rolled back the gains made in terms of workers' participation at the enterprise level. One worker remarked that 'it is clear that the expatriate heads of the enterprise are not ready to countenance any suggestion from the workers, let alone encourage active workers' participation in the running of the enterprise' (*ibid.*, 141). There was general agreement among the workers that social relations between the new management and workers had been strained considerably with privatisation. Most of the workers were constantly on edge since emphasis was being placed on achieving production targets. The consequence was that the atmosphere in WAMCO was palpably that of suspicion and of job insecurity.

#### *The case of Samatex Timber and Plywood Limited*

Samatex Timber and Plywood Company Ltd is located at Samreboi, deep in one of Ghana's rain forest reserves located in the Western Region. The company, state-owned until 1995, is now a joint private venture between a German company (40 per cent) and the Ghana Primewood Company (60 per cent). At the time of the study, Samatex was just about a year old as a privately owned company and was in the process of restructuring. Prior to privatisation the government had carried out massive retrenchment of the labour force of the company, downsizing it from 3,000 to 1,133 workers. The majority of the respondents were very unhappy about how this retrenchment exercise was carried out, indicating how it was used to axe out the most 'vocal' leaders of the union, how workers were not adequately consulted and how poorly the affected workers were compensated, driving a number of them into destitution. Women in particular suffered the greatest casualties.<sup>22</sup>

As regards the effects of privatisation, respondents stated it had resulted in increased production and productivity. New products had been introduced, new equipment and machinery brought in and better qualified personnel appointed. Punctuality and discipline among workers had improved, salaries, wages and bonuses were better and promptly paid. The workers gave several further reasons why the privatisation of the enterprise was a welcome development. Under state ownership the company became seriously distressed, fraught with mismanagement, corruption, patronage and nepotism. There were incidents of victimisation, tension, threats and industrial unrest and these appeared to be less frequent now (Amuah-Sakyi 2000, 158). The workers, however, felt more insecure for their employment and threatened

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22 This is a summary of a case study reported by Amuah-Sakyi 2000.

with dismissal for being pro-union in attitude and sympathy if they dared to question issues in the CBA that did not adequately address workers' interests.

One effect of privatisation was that it liquidated workers' participation. Under state ownership, the usual participatory structures (joint consultative committee, representation on the board of directors, durbars, suggestion boxes and the workplace committee for the defence of the revolution) were functional. All of these structures had ceased to exist and the local union now served as the only channel of getting workers' voices heard, but its strength was said to have waned since privatisation. The union executives themselves acknowledged this, stating that they were not really effective in their dealings with management.

### *The case of Gold Fields Tarkwa*

Gold Fields Tarkwa is located within Ghana's rich mineral belt in the western region and originated from a number of scattered mines opened by foreign private companies prior to the country's independence. The independent government of Ghana nationalised the mines in 1961 and put emphasis on creating employment for Ghanaians. In 1993 a South African mining company became the new owner of the mines and expectedly placed emphasis on profit making rather than on employment creation (Britwum 2000b, 162).<sup>23</sup> Under state ownership underground mining was the chief mode of mining but the new owners shifted emphasis to open-cast mining which is less labour-intensive and therefore led to squeezes on employment. The total workforce of 2,034 persons was reduced to 1,440 after privatisation.

The worker respondents intimated that workers were not involved in the retrenchment procedure even though management refuted this. The workers felt that the privatisation of the mine was rushed and it was not transparent. For instance, the criteria for retrenching workers were known only to top management but not the junior grade workers. Management reported that retrenchment was based on age, experience on the job, attitude to work and state of health of the worker. Workers who did not fall within this category could opt for voluntary retirement. All the workers of the Tarkwa mine were laid off just prior to the takeover by the South Africans. Some of these workers were then re-engaged and the rest retrenched (Britwum 2000b, 164). All junior staff interviewed did not approve of the manner in which the retrenchment exercise was carried out. It was their belief that the retrenchment exercise was based on subjective considerations, and that retrenchment was used to silence the most vocal workers. The example given was the case of the then secretary to the local union who, workers believed, was retrenched because he was known to be a strong union activist. In addition, retrenchment had driven many of their colleagues into destitution and early death as they were not given adequate compensation or training to acquire alternative skills. Retrenched workers were paid four months' salary in addition to the cost of transportation back to their hometowns, a retrenchment package which was far below that given to workers in the civil service (*ibid.*, 165).

Though workers of the mine were covered by CBA, it was clear that they had lost a number of the benefits they used to enjoy prior to privatisation. For instance, they were not at all happy with the obsolete machines they worked with, about grading

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23 This is a summary of a case study reported by Britwum 2000b.

and promotion procedures and issues pertaining to education and training. Though hours of work had not changed, workers reported substantial increases in workload and, indeed production had increased considerably. Workers also complained about not being granted enough time to recover from illness before resuming duty: 'we sometimes have to report for work covered with bandages'. Opportunities for casual leave had also dried up and workers had difficulty finding time to meet social obligations like funerals. Though wages and salaries had increased substantially with privatisation the bulk of the workers still remained dissatisfied with the current levels of remuneration as inflation eroded all increase. Dissatisfaction was also expressed over other working conditions such as transport and housing, health and safety standards at the workplace, workplace facilities like canteen and washrooms, all of which were said to have deteriorated considerably. Most workers were extremely unhappy about their present conditions of service. All worker respondents maintained that if ever they had a better opportunity, they would cease working in the company (*ibid.*, 167).

Elaborate workers' participation structures existed in the mines prior to privatisation as reported for the previous Ghana cases. Also a welfare and disciplinary committee existed. These structures ensured that workers had representation at various levels of decision making within the enterprise. Privatisation wiped away these participatory structures. At the time of the study no forum existed for workers and management to meet to exchange or share views and opinions. The new board of directors was composed of expatriates and one Ghanaian, but no workers were represented. Worker participation was restricted to occasional durbars. Also, the new management attempted in several ways to emasculate the workplace trade union.

Workers recalled an attempt by the expatriate management to replace the union with a council. Workers realised that the council was incapable of defending their interest and put up strong resistance, resulting in the reinstatement of the local union, which later successfully negotiated benefits such as overtime payments for working on Saturdays. However, the presence of the local union did not assure workers of any measure of involvement in decision making. The union executives acted as a liaison between workers and management, a situation aptly captured by one group of respondents who confessed that 'we are not involved in any form of decision making, the new management only informs us through the union'.

The imposition of the council also meant that there was no union when the new management took over. The organisation of the local union had to begin from scratch with the present management, as with privatisation, all workers were retrenched and had to be re-appointed. The new local union was faced with the task of constituting itself and its membership. Another problem was the constraint on the time of the officers. Union activists had to perform their normal work schedules as workers in addition to the tasks that their union offices imposed on them, so that they were not always available to perform union duties (Britwum 2000b, 170-1).

Social relations between workers and management and amongst workers prior to privatisation were said to be cordial. Also the fact that the management was wholly Ghanaian promoted the feeling of respect that existed. The Ghanaian management was reported to have had respect for trade union executives. Post-privatisation

relations appeared full of tension, And this was attributed to the type of administration introduced by a management originating from an apartheid system. Workers saw management as disrespectful and autocratic and, as such, unable to accept workers as partners in decision making.

Workers explained the cause of strained relations in the workplace. The major cause reported was the leadership style of management which was described as dictatorial; management was accused of attempting to introduce into the enterprise apartheid management techniques which the entire workforce found unacceptable. Other causes of poor social relations included the inability of management to interpret correctly Ghanaian labour laws. The expatriate management had to learn to adjust to Ghanaian workers. Such was the feeling of insecurity that the South African management were reported to have armed themselves with knives and pistols initially each time they came to the workplace. Junior workers reported that the attitude of the expatriate management to workers suggested a background of extreme hostile interaction with workers elsewhere over the years (Britwum 2000b, 177).

The new management was reported as not making any effort to humanise its relations with workers. Workers had been told that the prime objective of the enterprise was to mine for profit and not the provision of social services. Privatisation has brought job insecurity and poor conditions of service. It has eroded the gains made in workers' participation and workplace democracy under state ownership and has almost reduced workers to robots (*ibid.*).

#### *The case of The Golden Tulip Hotel*

The Golden Tulip Hotel in Accra was established in the early years of Ghana's independence and operated as a wholly state-owned enterprise for several decades. In 1990 it was acquired by the Ghana-Libya Arab Holding Company (GHLACO) with majority shares, and placed under the management of the Golden Tulip Hotel International of the Netherlands (Quaye 2000, 185).<sup>24</sup> At the time of the study, the hotel had a total workforce of 304. The privatised hotel started off in 1991 with fresh employees, some of them workers of the former Continental Hotel. In terms of efficiency in services rendered, there had been a vast improvement in the quality which was also the result of regular in-service training of all employees. The Golden Tulip Hotel has been making good profits consistently.

Employee satisfaction with the work environment and work conditions was mixed. Satisfaction was high with respect to training and re-training, health and safety, work discipline, transport, medical care and working hours. Dissatisfaction was very high with salaries, canteen arrangements and grading and promotion. Job insecurity and fear were rife amongst the employees. The local union executives were aware of these problems. But they were unable to push hard. Explaining the attitude of the union representatives, the workers said 'the union is trying but are careful not to lose their jobs in the process'.

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24 This is a summary of a case study reported by Quaye 2000.

On social relations at the workplace, the majority of workers indicated that relations between management and workers were poor and cases of worker unrest showed up from time to time. Some of the expatriate staff did not respect the junior employees. An instance was cited when an expatriate staff referred to some workers as 'black monkeys'. It took a lot of diplomacy for this to be settled amicably without degenerating into an industrial dispute and an embarrassment in international relations. The workers disclosed that most of the time victimisation did occur because of personal hatred of workers by some management staff. 'People are reported secretly but no proper investigations are conducted. Thereafter the worker concerned is sacked.' It was reported that there had been occasions when workers were wrongfully dismissed. According to the workers: 'The causes leading to such dismissals could have attracted lesser punishment. Most of the time the problem is about food.' The management did not give reasons for the dismissals in most cases. The workers were concerned about the rate at which workers were dismissed and described it as 'appalling and scandalous'. The worst part of it was that such dismissals were done without bringing the local union into the picture. 'By the time the local union gets to hear about it, the workers are gone already', the workers lamented. Some management staff commenting on what the workers said, added: 'There have been several instances when workers have been wrongfully dismissed. It is about ninety per cent of the time' (Quaye 2000, 210).

The respondents indicated that in the erstwhile Continental Hotel, various participatory structures had already faded out before privatisation. According to the workers the PNDC military regime had 'decreed' workers' participation at all state-owned enterprises and it disappeared together with the regime. Workers' participation remained weak in the Golden Tulip Hotel. All the key decision-making structures in the enterprise, including the board of directors and the management board, excluded workers. The trade union was represented on the standing joint negotiating committee and an ad hoc disciplinary committee. Even then, this disciplinary committee did not have any final authority on disciplinary matters referred to it other than to make recommendations, for approval by top management. The local union remained the only channel through which workers could express their views and grievances. The local union was quite active at the time of the study and was inundated with grievances from the workers which needed redress. In turn, management expected the union to bring workers in line with management directives and to help promote the business. The suggestion box and incidental durbars remained the only other channel of worker participation. These served, as worker respondents remarked, 'to solicit workers' views to avoid misunderstanding between management and workers and also to avoid conflicts'. A group of workers asserted that 'participation has diminished since privatisation because they want to enslave the workers. Invariably, the hotel is controlled from outside.'

### **Experience in South Africa**

Where worker participation was on the wane in many African countries, new initiatives were taken in post-apartheid South Africa. The ANC Reconstruction and Development Programme had stated:

Democracy is not confined to periodic elections, but is an active process enabling everyone to contribute to reconstruction and development; ... the Government's central goal is to democratise the economy and empower the historically oppressed, particularly the workers and their organisations, by encouraging broader participation in decisions about the economy in both the private and public sector (ANC 1994, paragraphs 1.3.7 and 3.2.1).

The achievement of these goals was made operational in a powerful national level consultation machinery (NEDLAC – the National Economic Development and Labour Council) and so-called 'workplace forums' (Du Toit et al. 2004; Anstey 1997a). The latter are workers' councils in workplaces that employ more than 100 people. These forums can only be set up if a representative trade union expressly asks for one. Workplace forums were supposed to have become the master model in South Africa's labour relations. They have not. After a timid beginning it appears no more than ten workplace forums were set up, and eventually only a few survived by 2002.<sup>25</sup> It would appear that the principal reason for the workplace forum failure is the trade union strategy. Trade unions feared their power would be reduced by participation, and that two different channels of worker representation would simply be duplication (Von Holdt 2003). Apart from the (failed) workplace forums project, the labour relations landscape of South Africa features a wide range of experience in workplace participation, and much of that experience has been recorded (Maller 1992; Maller 1994; Anstey 1990; Anstey 1997a; Du Toit 1997; see also footnote 25). These are mainly forms of self-initiated participation (by management or by unions, or as a joint initiative between these two). APADEP research in South Africa has concentrated on cases of self-initiated participation, in other words on 'voluntary' workplace participation. The main results are reported here.<sup>26</sup>

### *The case of Golden Arrow Bus Services*

Golden Arrow Bus Services is a big transportation company, owned by a community development foundation which puts dividends in a trust fund. Around 2,000 employees work in three main departments: the bus service, the maintenance unit and the administrative unit. The main participation structure of the company is the consultative committee, consisting of directors, union and management representatives and elected non-unionised workers. Furthermore, there is an annual election of a worker director: all employees can nominate members, and the top five candidates compete for election. The worker director has the same status power as the other members of the board of directors, and is also chairperson of the consultative

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25 As reported by South African researchers during the National Conference of the Industrial Relations Association (South Africa) (IRASA), *Technikon*, Johannesburg, August 2003.

26 The case studies were conducted by researchers of the Social Law Project of the University of West Cape under the co-ordination and leadership of Andrea Von Zelewski, to prepare an education manual for use in the Workers' Colleges of Cape Town and Durban (Social Law Project 2002).



committee. The company also runs a financial participation scheme: all employees receive 500 shares.

Many workers are member of five different trade unions which, after a period of tension, constituted a joint union forum to strengthen the workers' voice in participation structures, in particular to prepare for the issues on the agenda of the consultative committee. The trade unions do not engage in collective bargaining in the company as this is done at higher- (sector-)level bargaining councils. The main trade union activity is conducted through the 35 shop stewards, who are convened, at management initiative, in an annual 'breakaway weekend' to discuss issues affecting the company. Management's stated aim for this initiative is 'to improve the overall culture of the organisation and to diminish the "us and them" approach' (Social Law Project 2002, 5–6).

The consultative committee is a 'home-made' form of participation that, however, springs from legal provisions. The Employment Equity Act requires that every firm with over 50 employees 'must take reasonable steps to consult' and attempt to reach agreement on certain equity matters. The Skills Development Act requires the establishment of an in-house consultation forum regarding skills development. No procedures are prescribed on what form these consultations should take, but it is stipulated that management must consult with the representative trade union or with representatives nominated by their colleagues (Social Law Project 2002, 7).

The consultative committee is responsible for employment equity issues, affirmative action policies, skill development policies and all other issues concerning workers which can not be resolved within other structures. The committee does not deal with issues negotiated by bargaining councils. In most cases the committee reaches consensus; if not, the majority vote is binding. The worker representatives on the committee state the committee functions well and improves the relationship between management and workers, but the chairperson (the worker director) believes the committee is alienated from the workforce: issues do not come from the shop floor, and the committee's work does not reach the shop floor (*ibid.*, 9). The worker representatives held that the first worker director had not properly consulted the floor level, but the current worker director has introduced regular hours to give employees the opportunity to raise their basic concerns and problems. Yet he does not find this enough, and believes – just as the worker representatives on the consultative committee – that the present worker director scheme does not lead to real participation (*ibid.*, 7).

Management organises informal meetings with all employees in each department, to discuss upcoming issues of relevance to the department. Management also establishes ad hoc committees (like on smoking policy, on uniform policy, long-service awards policy, firearms policy and so on), consisting of worker representatives. There is no fixed procedure on how to form ad hoc committees. The ad hoc committee discusses its matters with management, and the latter reserves the right to take the final decision. Management stated in interviews that it considers both the consultative committee and the ad hoc committees *management–employee* and not *management–union* structures (*ibid.*, 8).

Management and worker representatives are both of the opinion that the company has achieved much by worker participation. There is a positive feedback and development in the relationship between management and workers. When an

economic crisis threatened the company in 2000, workers, unions and management stood side by side, and management believes this could not have happened without participation.

*The GKN Sinter Metals case*

GKN Sinter Metals is a fully privately owned motor components company in Belleville (near Cape Town). It employs 99 permanent staff and 23 fixed-term contract workers. The company had introduced lean production in 1998 with a commitment not to lay off any permanent staff; it re-organised production into five 'cells', working in a three-shift system. The unionised workers belong to two different unions; wages are negotiated in bargaining councils at sector level, not in the company.

On shareholders' initiative a transformation committee was established in 1995 and is the main participation structure of the firm. The draft Labour Relations Act served as a guideline to establish the committee which, however, drafted its own constitution which is dealing with the functions, the composition, the elections, the meetings, etc. The established committee consists of five members of the management team, one shop steward of each trade union, and four representatives elected by all employees annually. The committee has monthly meetings; each side has pre-meetings to discuss the agenda, which is available a week in advance. Anyone who likes to raise an issue may contact his/her representatives to put it on the agenda (Social Law Project, 14–20).

In 1999 the company was approached by NEDLAC to take part in the so-called Workplace Challenge Programme aimed at improving productivity, equity and job creation. The Programme was initiated by the Department of Trade and Industry to promote South Africa's entry into a competitive global market. The transformation committee decided to constitute a workplace challenge committee, whose members were appointed by the transformation committee; it met once a month (*ibid.*).

The transformation committee (TransCom) does not deal with collective bargaining, but with:

- restructuring the workplace
- changes in the organisation of work
- mergers and transfers of ownership as far as they have an impact on the workplace
- criteria for general merit increases
- education and training
- setting fair employment policies to protect and advance persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination
- recruitment policy, disciplinary procedures
- structure and effectiveness of communication channels.

The constitution of TransCom gives the committee the right to be consulted with a view to reach consensus, which in most cases happens. If no consensus is reached, management has the right to take the final decision. The constitution also gives the right to appoint an

external and impartial ombudsman in order to resolve disputes through conciliation. This never occurred.

The workplace challenge committee deals with workers' training and necessary activities with regard to strategy sessions on growth and profitability, productivity, 'looking after employees', and 'looking after customers'. This committee has the right to joint decision making and joint management on how to spend the money that is paid to the company out of the Workplace Challenge Programme. One joint decision was to undertake employee involvement training by an outside consultant on how to work within the new cell system, how to improve the performance and quality within the cells, and on all kinds of different problems which come up within the cells. The committee decided this training was mandatory, to the dislike of part of the workforce (Social Law Project 2002, 18–23).

The researchers report that in the beginning there were huge fights and discussions between management and labour in both committees. Both sides agree there was no trust between labour and management. After six years both sides agree that the level of trust has improved very much and the committees are now very dedicated and quite efficient in their work.

An illustration of the latter is given. In 2001 the company incurred important losses due to a strike in the motor industry. Management contacted TransCom to discuss the introduction of short-time work. The worker representatives could not agree, deliberated for one week and came up with a counter-proposal. Under the proposal all short-term contractors had to leave, training should be temporarily stopped, committee work should be temporarily cut down. All employees agreed to the proposal, and eventually, also management agreed. As a result management realised an improvement in performance and quality (Social Law Project 2002, 25).

### *The Medical Device Company case<sup>27</sup>*

The Medical Device Company is privately owned and produces safety syringes, primarily for export, using a new high-tech production process. The company counts 125 employees, most of them young and all employed on a permanent contract. Cleaning, security and gardening are outsourced. The organisation is in multi-skill teams of five persons, each team is responsible for its own production process. Eighty per cent of the employees are organised in one trade union, with three elected shop stewards. These three meet management every month in a trade union–management meeting, according to the recognition agreement signed by management; but these meetings take place less frequently in fact. This meeting is not for wage negotiation which happens at higher sector level in a bargaining council (Social Law Project, 26–33).

There are not less than seven participation structures in the company:

- daily staff meetings
- team meetings on Tuesdays
- meeting with maintenance on Fridays

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<sup>27</sup> This is not the company's real name.

- staff association meetings for unionised staff
- question/answer sessions with the whole workforce
- skills development committee
- health and safety committee.

The daily staff meetings are to discuss daily operational activities between supervisors and workers. Operational matters are also discussed every Tuesday between management, supervisor and team members per department, and the Friday maintenance meetings are between management, the maintenance team, and some members of the team meetings, to discuss operational and financial issues, a human resources report and a quality, production and maintenance report. Any issues may be raised at the staff association meeting, as well as at the questions/answers session with the whole work force, held every second month. The health and safety committee consists of four management members and four worker representatives, who discussed, for instance, how to deal with toxic substances in the sterilisation room. The skills development committee is not actually functioning.

Management is of the opinion that through all these participation procedures the workforce is well-informed. When the company was in a crisis, the workforce was informed daily of the situation. Also, daily meetings took place on quality development, and in these meetings decisions were taken on how to proceed, which investigations to conduct, on allocation of new responsibilities and so on. This was an ongoing process of consultation and decision making, according to management.

The trade union representatives had a different view. They wanted to be more involved in marketing issues (to also impact on the discussion on how to solve the economic crisis of the company), and wanted to be involved in the recruitment process. The union representatives also found they were not receiving sufficient information: information was too partial, some people were better informed than other, supervisors did not report back to workers, or not properly or completely. The entire communication process was found insufficient, and the example was given of the question/answer sessions which were found to be too short, and where the workforce was not involved in preparing them. All these problems of information and communication prevented a real consultative process, according to the trade union representatives (Social Law Project 2002, 34–5).

The union representatives feel that management does not really listen to the interests of the workforce, and suggest that the consultation process must be more planned and formalised, with clear responsibilities, outcomes and follow-ups, and that there should be agendas which must be exchanged in advance in order that every party can prepare. They also feel there are too many structures and meetings in place and suggest one single participation structure. Such a structure, they maintain, should involve all workers, unionised or not, with adequate information provision and involving workers in more serious issues, such as marketing, production planning, quality management, recruitment of staff, etc. (*ibid.*, 41–2).

### *The Consani Engineering case*

This company is a container manufacturer in Western Cape, privately owned, employing 657 employees and 138 labour brokers. The majority of the workers (71 per cent) are unionised in three different trade unions.

The participatory structure of the company is channelled through the trade unions. The three trade unions at company level have formed a 'trade union forum' of shop stewards, representing the three unions pro rata. The employer has concluded a so-called 'agency shop agreement' with the majority trade union, which authorises the employer to deduct an agency fee from the wages of the employees who are not union members and pay it to the union which is acting as their bargaining agent. The trade union forum represents *all* workers of the company in the same way.

In the recognition agreement between the employer and the three trade unions a consultative meeting was established, which is a monthly meeting between the trade union forum and management. The recognition agreement does not contain rules and regulations concerning the internal organisation of the consultative meetings, but stipulates that the chair shall rotate between the chairperson of the trade union forum and the company's production director or his nominee, and that minutes of meetings should be kept (Social Law Project, 47–54).

The union forum has the right to meet once a month for a maximum of two hours. For an extension of time management may be approached for permission. The forum representatives may hold general meetings with union members on the first Tuesday of every month during lunch breaks. The forum has the right to report back to employees within certain times. The company allows representatives one hour to report back to their constituencies and 45 minutes to prepare for meetings (Social Law Project 2002, 52).

Like in all previous South Africa cases studied, anything to do with collective bargaining falls under a bargaining council at sector or national level. The consultative meeting between the union forum and management is primarily concerned with information and consultation on:

- productivity issues
- work re-organisation issues, including bonus schemes and wage disparities
- employment equity policies
- skills development policies
- health and safety issues
- disciplinary codes
- representation of workers in disciplinary proceedings
- representation of worker's interests in general.

According to the union forum members the work at the consultative meeting is not very efficient: lack of information, long discussions without any result, many issues postponed to next meeting, and some issues, like the skills development policies, not put on the agenda for months (*ibid.*, 54). The union representatives also find that there is no transparent information policy, and often management does not inform the trade union forum in time, or not properly, or not at all. Some examples were given: the company budget came up for discussion but the information was not understandable; shareholders and investors visited the company and the forum was not informed or invited; the forum did not obtain information on the work of contract workers (*ibid.*, 52). Management maintained that it makes available all important information in a form that is easy to understand.

The union forum members were all shop stewards who are according to the recognition agreement entitled to five days' paid leave to undergo training, which is provided by

trade unions. The company does not have influence on the topic or type of training. But over and above that, the company provided training on issues that affect both labour and management, for instance training on how to function in meetings. According to the union forum members, the amount of training was not enough (*ibid.*, 56).

Management was quite satisfied with the worker participation procedure in the company. Workers were more involved in issues that affect them, they were more co-operative, misunderstandings were taken away, and the likelihood of the union to strike was reduced. In short, management found the effect on industrial relations was good. Management wanted to continue the system, listening to the workers' suggestions and complaints, thus demonstrating it cared about workers' viewpoints.

The union forum members did not agree, and found there was no good relationship with management, who continued to decide on many matters with or without proper consultation. Management was only keen to bring issues to the union for which they needed help in crisis situations such as lay-offs and other structural changes. The union members wanted to be consulted at an earlier stage and wanted to have more time to explain issues to their members (*ibid.*, 57).

#### *The I & J Fishing Industry case*

I & J Fishing Industry operates a large trawling fleet, with 42 vessels based in five South African harbours. The present case study concerns the trawling division located at the main harbour in Cape Town. This division operates 20 deep-sea vessels for deep-sea hake fishing; 1,300 persons work in the division, of whom 900 are seagoing staff. Different legislation applies to seagoing and shore-based staff, and also major wage inequalities exist. The latter problem is now addressed for the seagoing staff through a bargaining council (three labour and three business representatives), responsible for wage negotiations and working conditions. Shore-based staff are still excluded.

Also unionisation is divided. Practically all seagoing staff are members of the Trawler and Line Fishers' Union; the shore-based staff have a lower degree of unionisation, in three different unions. Each of the four unions has its own structure, meet monthly, but do not work together (neither do they compete), and the researchers conclude that management is benefiting from the lack of trade union co-operation (Social Law Project 2002, 66).

For a long time, no worker participation whatever took place in the firm. Then, monthly consultative meetings started to function, replaced a few years ago by the employment equity and skills committee. This is now the core committee to discuss problems. It consists of 15/16 members and includes shore-based and seagoing employees, trade union representatives and management representatives. There is no formal agreement for the committee. Furthermore, some departments have departmental forums. One of these, in the discharge department, consists of about 30 workers who meet on a regular basis to discuss work organisation, working regulations, shift systems and training needs. The functioning of the employment equity and skills committee was further scrutinised by the researchers.

As in previous cases studied, the committee did not deal with payment issues and, indeed, concentrated on equity and training. Other examples of activity were given. Worker representatives reported that part of the seagoing staff had year's-end functions. The shore-based staff suggested they should also have such functions or at least vouchers instead, but this was refused. The company gave the budgeted money to charity organisations instead, without asking the employees. Seagoing employees wanted free protective clothing, a privilege already available to officers and shore-based staff. The matter was not solved, and the trade union took over the issue (Social Law Project 2002, 68).

The worker representatives on the committee assessed that there was a lack of participation and many committee members did not attend the meetings as there was no progress. There was a lot of discussion but no real consultation and no follow-up, they stated. Management did not give sufficient information and, in the end, management took decisions alone. Worker representatives also opined that the departmental forums were not a form of worker participation. They saw them as management meetings to deal with operational issues, such as the delay of vessels, how to avoid it, improvements in the daily operations of business, etc. Sometimes workers were informed of the outcome of these discussions on the notice board, but usually not (*ibid.*, 66–7).

A group of employees suggested establishing a workplace forum to discuss all these problems in one agenda, but the union rejected the suggestion. The trade unions had also been against the earlier consultative meetings in which the workers could voice their concerns and problems within the company. 'Union officials sometimes perceived these meetings as a threat, because unions think that employees can now present issues for discussion or resolution without first having gone via the union' (*ibid.*, 66).

### **A First Evaluation of Voluntary Workplace Democracy**

This chapter presented experiences in six countries which had different types of labour relations. In some, worker representation was exclusively channelled through trade unions in traditional negotiating roles, in others trade union structures were also used to get access to workplace decision making, and again in other countries several worker participation procedures existed side by side with trade union representation, as was the case in Mali, Ghana and South Africa.

Where worker participation was practised indeed a myriad of different forms existed. In the cases under review more than 20 different forms of participation were identified and these may be grouped as follows:

- *individual participation*: suggestion box, suggestion schemes
- *organisational participation*: staff meetings, departmental forums, total quality management
- *political participation*: committees for the defence of the revolution, transformation committees
- *joint management-worker consultation*: joint management committees, consultative meetings, consultative committees, workplace challenge committees

- *collective direct worker participation*: general assemblies, question/answer sessions per department
- *joint management–trade union consultation*: standing joint negotiation committees, union–management meetings, joint union forums
- *specialised management–worker and/or trade union consultation*: safety and health committees, disciplinary committees, welfare committees, appointment committees, promotion committees, employment equity and skills development committees, social fund committees, ad hoc committees
- *financial participation*: incentive schemes, share participation schemes
- *co-determination*: worker directors
- *worker/trade union self-management*.

In the studies of francophone countries (Togo, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso), relations between management and workers occurred via the trade unions, or through ‘worker delegates’ [*délégués du personnel*] who are elected directly or through trade union channels. In Mali there had been union-based enterprise participation committees under the Traoré Administration as part of the ‘responsible participation’ policy, but later there were no set procedures for worker participation and any worker influence depended on the inventiveness of trade union representatives and the responsiveness of management. In some cases this led to some result: several demands were granted and suggestions by worker representatives accepted and implemented. But participation remained unstructured: mostly there were no records, no minutes, no agendas. Also the ‘worker delegates’, even when labour legislation defined their rights and duties, had to find their own way as they were mostly ignorant of the legislation. In a number of companies studied there was a quasi total absence of participation and also of trade union influence. Where worker representation was channelled exclusively through trade union channels, the picture was even more gloomy. In Guinea and Burkina Faso rudimentary forms of trade unionism produced sometimes a bitter struggle, weakened by trade union plurality, and hardly ever successful for the workers. The Guinea case studies depicted strict hierarchical structures which left no room for worker influence. The studies provided information on the struggle for any kind of worker representation. Under the Sékou Touré regime there had always been doubts on the mandate of the persons elected in the presence of the single political party and its co-opted trade union. The case studies repeatedly report on the residual party and government bias of the trade unionists belonging to the confederation CNTG which was a political party mouthpiece for decades in the country. The worker delegates appeared at times no longer to be trusted by either management or workers. In Guinea and Burkina Faso workers felt frustrated about not being consulted and not being able to influence the fate of the company they worked in, which was their source of livelihood.

The Ghana case studies (conducted at the end of the 1990s) showed an ‘implosion’ of workplace democracy under privatisation. Under previous mobilising and later ‘soldier’ regimes, various forms of participation were introduced, in many cases reportedly appreciated, in several cases not trusted or faded out. Privatisation meant a radical change. In most cases the workers were first massively laid off, followed by re-appointment (but certainly not for all) on new terms of employment contract.



The retrenchment procedure in all cases studied was typically non-participatory: there was little or no information, workers and trade unions were not consulted, and all found the exercise non-transparent or arbitrary, followed by accusations that trade union troublemakers or vocal workers were not re-appointed, or, as one study mentioned, 'axed out'. This did not augur well for the future of the existing participation structures. The new management, often with expatriates at the top, restored unilateral management prerogative, which the workers found difficult to challenge: their fear of losing their employment silenced worker protest against authoritarian rule. In several cases the trade union had to start from scratch, seeking to secure legal recognition. In one case management tried to replace the trade union by an in-house council – rejected by the workers who rather trusted their trade union. Overall, the main message emerging from the Ghana reports is that worker participation was 'rolled back', became 'token' or 'piecemeal', or was found 'inadequate in numbers and deficient in functioning'. And 'the forms of participation as they exist now only represent a kind of goodwill gesture from management and owners of capital granted in order to achieve a measure of industrial stability and tranquillity at the workplace' (Agbesinyale 2000a, 124–38).

The five cases studied in South Africa (in the years 2000–01) showed a different picture. In South Africa, there is worker influence through militant trade union adversarial action at levels above the workplace in sector bargaining councils. At the workplace, a multitude of participation schemes exist and function, often in co-operation or co-ordination with trade unions. Even in the smaller companies studied there were multiform participation structures; in one case there were seven different committees for a total of 125 employees. Mainly organisational and welfare matters came up for consultation, but in all cases studied management reserved the right of final decision. What is striking in most of the South Africa case studies is that the researchers reported that management was content about participation as it could brief workers on their policies and get to know worker opinions. Workers and trade unions were much less satisfied, and mentioned the 'classic' shortcomings: no, sporadic or only partial information from management, incomprehensible documents, insufficient time (in one case 45 minutes allowed for one monthly consultative meeting) and, above all, consultations without results for workers. And where worker representatives pleaded they wanted a more formalised structure with rules and regulations and more formal power, the trade unions opposed this as they appeared to have adopted the policy to avoid workplace forums (Social Law Project 2002).

### *Meaningful participation and some achievements*

Wherever participation existed, the respondents in the studies found it meaningful for themselves as it gave them the opportunity to express themselves on a wide range of matters of importance to them. Worker representatives also managed to secure several material benefits for their fellow workers. These included increase and payment of salaries on time, improvement of drinking water, catering for workers' welfare during sickness, funeral allowances, credit schemes, medical facilities and other advantages. Participation most often referred to welfare and working conditions,

offering a sort of 'therapy', but in several countries (generally Guinea, Burkina Faso and Togo) such therapy opportunity was hardly existent, and the researchers concluded that workers were working 'like robots' or 'like slaves'. The same would hold for most reported cases of the Ghana enterprises after privatisation. In small companies like the case of the Mopti bakery in Mali where family members spy and report on the other workers, the 'labour relations based on fear' (as the researchers called them) are characterised by distrust among the workers themselves. It must be assumed that there are many such small firms in Africa where employees are at the exclusive mercy of the owner and her/his family.

When committees wanted to influence important policy or business decisions, this was mostly not allowed. Exceptionally, in the GKN Sinter Metals case and the Cosani Engineering case in South Africa, policy issues like change in the organisation, transfer of ownership and employment policies were brought onto the agenda by the worker representatives. In GKN Sinter Metals the workplace challenge committee (with a majority worker/trade union representation) obtained the right of co-decision on how to spend the money made available by the government workplace challenge programme.

The workers appreciated the general assemblies to exchange views and opinions, to criticise, put forward suggestions, claims, doubts, etc. In most countries studied these general assemblies had become a regular feature in workplace labour relations, were used by unions and management alike as platforms, and in a number of cases were reported to occur rather frequently. They could be considered a sort of *palavre* channel, an African tradition, where workers could express themselves, get information, make proposals, air views and ventilate criticism on a wide range of issues such as the organisation of work, distribution of tasks, planning of production, salary rises, indemnities, overtime work, social security procedures, establishment of a canteen, construction of sanitary provisions, installation of drinking water, improvement of safety and health at work, training of workers, regularisation of the work contracts of people who are fully employed and so on.

In the privatisation cases in Ghana it was regretted by worker respondents that these assemblies disappeared, or even more, as in the WAMCO case reported above, that these meetings were now used by management to brief workers on management policy – and that was precisely not the *durbar* tradition. The case study data suggests that this 'mass participation' tradition can have some comparative advantages vis-à-vis the other participatory structures. First and foremost, it allows participation for all. Many rank and file feel very happy to be given the chance to talk to management face-to-face. This is particularly true in the large enterprises, where there is a communication breakdown between the 'privileged' few worker representatives and mass workers at the grassroots level.

### *But participation is not effective*

Whatever the forms of participation, they were instruments of information channelling and occasional consultation, mostly on questions of work organisation, and foremost in the interest of management. Participation did not penetrate in company policy. The outcome of all discussion remained in the hands of management. Most

worker participation formats were like loose flying ropes, without agreed-upon or otherwise formalised procedures on rights and duties, on follow-up, on training or education support, without resources, etc. Not only were the structures weak, also their functioning left much to be desired. There was no infrastructure of resources, often there were no records, no minutes, no agendas. Effectiveness was very low even where worker representatives were in majority position. Any worker influence depended on the inventiveness of worker representatives and the responsiveness of management. Also the 'worker delegates' had to find their own way, mostly ignorant of the legislation (as was shown in Chapter 6).

Privatisation gave management the opportunity to claim back full managerial prerogatives and abandon any earlier practice of worker participation. The Ghana case studies show the puzzling reactions of workers. On the one hand these complained that workload and stress had increased, a number of previous rights abandoned (like more generous leave arrangements); on the other hand they hailed the greater efficiency, the often better working conditions like washrooms and canteen provisions, timely wage and salary payments, etc. But there was one overriding concern: the fear of losing employment, and this had a major impact on workplace labour relations. Workers now keep a low profile rather than claim participation rights. Thus the earlier forms of consultation, however weak they already were, could be easily replaced by a strict top-down management hierarchy.

#### *Trade union representatives versus worker representatives?*

Wages and other questions relating to the terms of employment are in many of the reviewed countries decided in bi- or tripartite negotiation, often at sector or industry level (as in South Africa or Ghana) or at national level (as in Burkina Faso or Guinea). The trade union role at the workplace may then be limited to assuring adherence to collective agreements, but workplace trade union representatives often also wanted to represent worker interests other than those already covered under collective bargaining agreements. When doing so, the trade union enters the terrain of participation in the organisation, management and policy of the workplace. And in many cases studied trade unions did take up such issues on behalf of all workers, of whom some or many were not unionised. This legitimacy question may be resolved in situations where general assemblies exist in which the trade union plays an active role. The assembly links the trade union leadership to the rank and file as every worker of the workplace is present. The Perfinc case in Guinea could be an example of how a trade union performed worker participation functions on behalf of its members as well as of the entire workforce.

The case studies also point at the continuation of residual characteristics of trade union traditions under one party or military regimes. In the case studies in Guinea in particular, frequent reference was made to reported criticism of the once-single trade union federation CNTG in clear terms: 'they spy on us', 'as if we are still in the old regime', 'they are intelligence units of the party'. In Mali workers reported that they see their union representatives as in service of management and the local administration. Another residual tradition is to count on financial and other material support from management as this was extended in state or public enterprises

under party-cum-trade union tutelage. When trade unions accepted such support in the privatised firms, the workers became suspicious, like in the case of a donated motorbike in SOBRAGUI in Guinea, but also for instance in Ghana in the GOPDC case where workers were suspicious management was 'buying' the union.

In many cases trade union structures existed side by side with worker participation procedures that were open to all workers, unionised or not. The South Africa case studies show that this co-existence can work: the trade unions play traditional roles of representing their members on questions of conditions of employment, and participation forums deal with questions of workplace organisation, management and policy. But where a demarcation of trade union and participation tasks is not made, overlap, confusion, competition and even conflict are likely to happen. 'Islands of representation' as the Mali researchers had aptly noted, come into existence, and where management claims its decision-making prerogative, it will find it more convenient to deal with counteractive rather than concerted worker representation.

Where worker participation structures existed, often at management initiative, these were (as one might expect) seen by the worker representatives as opportunities for bargaining, and not solely as frameworks for involvement in organisational and managerial questions. Wherever the topics dealt with under participation were mentioned in the case studies, these often overlapped with what would normally be considered trade union issues. And here the confusion became at times complete. Faced by many urgent problems, workers would seek any channel to represent their interests, in particular when they were not satisfied with trade union performance. Only if trade union and worker participation procedures are complementary and subject to co-ordination and co-operation between trade union and other worker representatives (as was the case in South Africa) can participation be expected to become more effective. If not, the door for manipulation is wide open for management.

### *The way forward*

All this experience falls short of the expectations of the workers and worker and trade union representatives alike. Where worker participation is absent (Guinea, Burkina Faso) workers feel frustrated about not being consulted and not being able to influence the fate of the company they work in. In Ghana they are disappointed that the schemes of participation that existed – with all their weaknesses – have disappeared. For them, participation had brought a degree of human dignity in labour relations, which they now lost. In South Africa frustration over low effectiveness does not imply withdrawal but rather ambition to give these forms of workplace participation more formal power. In Chapter 11 a further analysis of the lessons to be drawn from experience will be made, and propositions on how to make workplace democracy more meaningful, democratic and effective will be developed.

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## Chapter 8

# Statutory Workplace Democracy in Zambia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe

In Chapter 7, experience with ‘voluntary’ workplace democracy in six countries was reviewed. In a few countries worker participation in decision making was instituted formally, with statutory rules and regulations defining rights and duties of the parties involved, prescribing procedures to follow, and defining the ‘status’ of the decisions eventually reached. In some countries these formal structures were promulgated by presidential or government directives or were given the force of law. How and with what success have these forms of participation been practised? The present chapter will summarise case study results in Zambia under the erstwhile Kaunda Administration, and in Tanzania and Zimbabwe where statutory and legal forms of participation are still operational.

### **Experience with Works Councils in Zambia<sup>1</sup>**

Democratisation of labour relations was introduced in Zambia in the 1970s by the single political party UNIP as one of the pillars of building a new nation on the basis of humanism. The first guidelines for *industrial participatory democracy* put full emphasis on the philosophical and moral considerations which should underlie the new labour relations in Zambia (Mwiya 1979, 115). President Kaunda stated that workers’ participation was intended to remove the alienation of the worker in industry, to promote human dignity, ‘to bestow upon every worker the right to fully participate in the control and management of the enterprise in which he works’, to create democratic procedure in a one-party state and also to advance an envisaged economic democracy. Finally, industrial participatory democracy was launched as a vehicle to ensure optimal use of human resources: productivity and industrial peace as a condition for worker commitment to production were sought to be achieved (Mwiya 1979, 85 and 125; Fincham and Zulu 1980).

The Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) requested APADEP to make an exploratory evaluation of experience with industrial participatory democracy in Zambia, assessing the possible effectiveness and meaningfulness of the works councils, and analysing more closely the relationship between the councils and existing trade union structures. This study was conducted in 1984, and consisted mainly of interviews and group interviews with over 100 persons active in 17 works councils in the Copperbelt region, as well as interviews with representatives of institutions and

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1 This section on the Zambian case is a summary of Kester 1984.

organisations involved in the implementation of industrial participatory democracy, and with trade union representatives at national and workplace level. Though the project was not a representative study for Zambia it was a sufficient basis for discovering issues, questions and trends. A useful perspective could be given to the data by comparing them with another study made in 13 enterprises (Mwiya 1979) and an opinion survey on works councils among 131 workers and managers.<sup>2</sup>

*Works councils: the law and its application*

The principal objectives of works councils as stated in the Industrial Relations Law were 'to promote and maintain the effective participation of workers in the affairs of the undertaking ... and to secure the mutual co-operation of workers, management of the undertaking and the trade union in the interest of industrial peace, improved working conditions, greater efficiency and productivity' (Industrial Relations Act 1971, section 69). Works councils were to be established in every undertaking employing not less than 100 eligible employees, and were to be composed of two thirds elected members representing the workers, and one third management-appointed members.

The law provided the works council with the right of information on such important matters as investment policy, financial control, distribution of profits, economic planning, job evaluation, wages policy and the appointment of senior management executives.<sup>3</sup> A clause on the secrecy of the financial information provided underlines the passive role of the council on these matters. The law provided for consultation rights for all schemes and programmes relating to health and welfare; specifically mentioned were medical facilities, housing, pension schemes, recreational facilities, canteens, and so on.

The works council had veto power on matters of policy in the field of personnel management and industrial relations. Also, here the law specified the areas to which veto powers extended: recruitment of employees, assessment of salaries of employees, transfers, discipline rules, redundancy, bonuses, incentives and safety. This section of the law was the most important step in the direction of effective and meaningful participation since it intended to involve the council in the policy of the company. However, involvement in policy making was not possible under the provisions of the same law. The works council could get involved *after* the decision-making process among management was completed, and 'approval of policy shall not be unreasonably withheld' (Quemby 1975, 91). If the council wanted to use its veto power it had to inform management in writing about its reasons (management does not have to inform the council of its reasons, in writing). If the management did not change its policy and the council persisted in its disapproval, the matter was to be referred to a board of review where the worker-elected members of the council lost

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2 This survey was conducted by the Industrial Participatory Democracy Department but was not published. Fincham and Zulu (1980) have published some of its major statistics in their article.

3 Critics have expressed their amazement that on these crucial decisions workers 'were not even allowed to offer suggestions' (Fincham and Zulu 1980, 176).

their majority position (this board consisted of one member appointed by the council, one appointed by management and a neutral third member). Failing a solution the Industrial Relations Court had the final say. No such case has ever reached the Court and no board of review has ever existed. The councils either remained silent or approved policy. From the point of view of the workers there was a particular danger here: previously management policy was a unilateral management responsibility, now it became a personnel or industrial relations policy implicitly *approved* by the works council, thus committing the workforce to that policy. This section of the law could put the trade union in an awkward position since many of these areas are a traditional focus of trade union activity.

The demarcation between the works council and the trade union became even more complex in the ‘watchdog function’ of the council, where the council had to inform management of infringements or contravention of any provision of, among others, a collective agreement. A collective agreement is a contract between two parties and if that contract is not adhered to, that is a matter between those two parties, and the role of the works council here was very puzzling. Moreover, the works council operated on different principle of labour–management relations (consultation and potentially joint decision making) than the trade union (negotiation), and both avail themselves of different types of information. It is not surprising that this section of the law has given rise to much confusion in the Industrial Relations Court.<sup>4</sup>

The published analyses of the legislation with respect to works councils draw ample attention to its weakness. The objectives of the law could not be realised in the legislation as it was, and industrial participatory democracy as realised in the Act ‘favoured management and capital owners’ (Fincham and Zulu 1980, 185). What was particularly pointed out was that there was a gap between the political considerations of President Kaunda and the law as it was finally adopted. ‘The objectives formulated got lost in the legislative melting pot. The law could not achieve any of the aims of the President, Dr Kaunda’ (Quemby 1975, 86 and 92).

#### *Works councils: an appreciation of experience*

The degree of participation stipulated in the law was information, consultation or veto power – depending on the area of decision making. Workers stated they had difficulty in digesting the information they received on the economic performance of the company, and the information received was limited to summaries, one-page balance sheets, etc. – in other words no detailed insights were obtained on the business policy of the company, nor could these be derived from the professional documents made available. The latter point was confirmed by a labour officer: ‘Most of the elected works councillors fail to grasp the operation of their own establishment and are generally unable to analyse information supplied by management which, it must be admitted, is sometimes deliberately made difficult to understand’.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Interview with the chairperson and members of the Industrial Relations Court (July 1984).

5 As stated by a labour officer in an interview.



The main criticism of worker-members on the council was not directed, however, at the nature of the information, but to the fact that they could not do anything with it. One of them said: 'Getting information is not participation: you have no possibility to change something in the company since the information is always referring to things already decided, and you cannot pass on that information to others to do something with it. You simply swallow it.' A further criticism relating to the information was that works councillors received very little information on the decisions they were entitled to be consulted upon or upon which they had the right of approval. The agendas for many council meetings were handed over at the beginning of the meeting, and seldom were documents provided that explained a policy or a decision to be discussed. The councillors had to go by oral presentation by management.

The main activity in the council was consultation on welfare matters (broadly conceived): it was the most often recurring item on the agenda. All welfare items were put on the agenda by worker-elected council members. The workers had a majority voting power and many resolutions were adopted which expressed the preferences of the workers. But the resolutions had a consultation status: the final decision remained with management. Usually the resolutions were sent to the general manager or to the management committee, and the minutes of council meetings were often also submitted to the board of directors. On minor matters the council decisions were implemented (for instance the sale of stamps at the reception desk, since post offices are closed after working hours), but if accepting a council proposal involved a considerable sum of money, the workers reported, resolutions were not implemented. Typical issues were staff transport and housing. In one company, a subsidiary of a big national concern, the overall policy was that transport 'may or may not be provided'. The works council adopted a resolution that transport was to be provided. The resolution was not implemented; buses were available but were leased to another company to make profits. Also, unanimous council decisions (that is, those made with the concurrence of management-appointed members) were often not implemented.

Management motivated its non-acceptance of resolutions with reference to its inability to pay. In a number of works councils the worker-elected members were quite bitter about this since, as they said, they had insufficient information on the financial situation of the company and were not allowed to discuss priorities in company expenditure. They were also not allowed, as some have tried, to point at a number of expenditures for management which workers found unreasonable. Management then maintained that the council could not discuss the work conditions of managers. Quite often the works council received no information about the follow-up of its decisions.

In the study no case was found where effective use was made of the right of veto on company policy on industrial relations and personnel management. In one (big) company the management and the works council had come to an agreement to discuss company policy in general (besides the specific policy on industrial relations and personnel management) and to do so before the actual policy was finally established. Even though this active and timely involvement in company policy was consultative in nature, this case provided an example of how participation could be jointly

developed in the spirit of the law. There was one more company where the council (on insistence of the worker-elected members) put full emphasis on company policy by asking questions on important policy decisions by management, thus beginning to make management accountable to the workers. This council met stiff management resistance. But most councils report they had little or no grip on policy and had often given up trying. They described the role of the council in decision making as follows: 'First, management exhausts its own decision-making process to come to a policy decision. The works council is informed of the decision. If it does not raise objections the policy becomes council-approved policy.' Worker-elected council members found it difficult to disapprove. They did not get hold of the necessary information: 'On what grounds to disagree?' Generally the policy was announced as 'information' and conveyed orally by management. Workers were often taken by surprise. They had no time to consult each other, let alone others, if they were not forewarned that a certain issue was going to be discussed and there were no documents explaining the position of management. In a few cases worker-elected members had asked for postponement of approval and this was granted, and the in-between time was used to gather information. Some council members reported that in that interim period management had sometimes intimidated members, or has talked to some of them separately to win support for the management policy. But since the council members did not have access to all information used in the management committee or in the board of directors (they had access to neither), they were outsmarted in a second round of policy debate and could not insist on disapproval. Afterwards, as one member declared, the worker members were put under psychological pressure not to delay management policy again: 'as you could see last time, management knows how to decide'.

A cumulative list of items on the agenda of the 21 companies whose representatives took part in the 1984 group interviews is presented below.<sup>6</sup>

- Put on the agenda by management: financial reports, sales reports, production reports, reports on material position of the company, information on a division of a plant, company policy on funerals, loans committee, amalgamation of sections (cost saving), efficiency measures, retraining of officers, organisation of company anniversary.
- Put on the agenda by worker-elected council members: establishment of safety committee, protective clothing against dust, retirement age, provisions for early retirement, retirement benefits, policy on company housing, allocation of company housing, workers' education and training, transport and the staff bus route, allowances for persons attending President Citizenship College (PCC) training programme, canteen facilities, improvement of canteen, price of *nsima* [Zambian dish] in the canteen, purchase of stamps at factory reception desk, Zambianisation of staff, identity cards, uniforms, bonus, welfare, discipline, loans, working conditions, funeral allowances, safety, sports (Kester 1984).

The lack of actual power had not discouraged the council members. The earlier studies had shown a high impetus on the part of the worker councillors to participate

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<sup>6</sup> The representatives were asked to mention the agenda items of the two most recent meetings, and to state who had put them on the agenda.

(Mwiya 1979, 156) even when the lack of competence of the council was severely criticised (Fincham and Zulu 1980, 183). It could be argued that high participation propensity could be expected shortly after the introduction of workers' participation. But the APADEP case study more than five years later showed that the councillors were still keen and, at times, poised to participate. At elections there were at least three to five times more candidates than council positions available. The estimates given (and counterchecked) on the use of voting rights indicate that 60 to 80 per cent of the eligible workers went to vote. Voting impetus was also high when a weak council terminated its term of office. In one company it was reported that the previous council had failed ('the workers were drinking with the general manager, some members were bought by management'), but that the elections for the new council were 'hot' and almost all workers voted. In another firm the worker-elected chairman of the council (who was reported to be very active) was promoted to a management position and thereby had to give up his council membership. According to the workers this was precisely what management sought to achieve, but also here a spontaneous election drive mobilised workers to vote for a new candidate who, they hoped, would remain loyal to the workers.

Also, the council members themselves had remained eager to participate, not because of their satisfaction with the present situation, but apparently because there was a widespread expectation that the council was going to be more important, and the worker-elected council members had quite clear ideas of how they would expect the council to improve. In all group discussions, worker-elected council members stated they wanted more power. There were many ways in which they specified this. Some stressed the necessity for more information, and not of the kind that 'there was a company profit' or 'there was no company profit'; the law should be more specific on what information was to be given. The policy of the company should be discussed before decisions were taken, and the council should take part in weighing alternatives and priorities, if possible with effective power in adopting policy. Other council members proposed that the company law should change. The general manager was now accountable to the board of directors. He should be, *ex officio*, a member of the council so that he would also be accountable to the workers. Even when the council could not get the power of approval, the general manager could at least be asked to explain company policy. Another council member suggested that the general manager should first get council approval of the annual report before submitting it to the board. And others suggested delegating a representative of the council to the board of directors. One council member said the appointment of all senior executives should be subject to consultation with the council, not just the appointment of personnel manager as was now the case.

The above suggestions show that though the council members had little or no power, their perception or awareness of the existing power structure had undergone a change. Their frustrations in the council work were an important learning experience in the reality of labour relations. A striking feature has been their ambition to influence policy making. Even though the Industrial Relations Act had given little effective influence, it forced management to open up (through information or consultation) those areas of decision making which constitute the core of power structure (overall business policy), and central direct concerns of employees (personnel and industrial

relations). Whether intended or not, the law had thus helped raise the consciousness of the works councillors in the direction of sharing policy control, and not of sharing executive management. The council members were also becoming more conscious of where the obstacles to effective participation lay. The most important obstacle was, in their view, management resistance.

One of the earlier studies in Zambia had paid special attention to management attitude and behaviour (Mwiya 1979, 187ff). Case studies of 11 enterprises led to the following conclusions:

Most managers are isolated, inaccessible, unco-operative and not very friendly according to the worker-elected council members (*ibid.*, 188) ... Managers try to influence worker-elected council members to follow the course of action which management has advocated, even when the workers take the initiative to give out their ideas, these are either not taken seriously or they are simply thrown out as unreasonable or unacceptable (*ibid.*, 189) ... Management only accepts worker views if they are complementary or supplementary to the management point of view (*ibid.*, 190).

According to Mwiya's study unfavourable management attitudes are caused by the managers' ideas about participation. Most managers think that participation negates corporate autonomy, has no immediate value and is an unwanted bother (*ibid.*, iv). In Mwiya's survey of workers' opinions 70 per cent stated they believed management was opposed to participation; when asked to indicate the single most hindering factor, 'poor uncooperative management attitudes' got the highest score (*ibid.*, 190). Very conspicuously, these problems with management were more rampant in private than in parastatal firms (*ibid.*, 215).

In the case study reported here, no detailed information was gathered on management, as its focus was different. Nevertheless, many councillors spontaneously expressed their feelings about the relationship between worker-elected and management-appointed members. A managing director of a private company (a council member himself) explained that workers should not misunderstand the exclusive decision-making powers of management: 'the works council is a sounding board, a place for discussion, for an exchange of views between managers and workers; management has the only and the last word'. Similar attitudes were expressed more often during company visits. Only in one (state) enterprise did the managers say that they were happy with the works council and were taking the considered opinion of workers into account before arriving at final decisions. Nevertheless, the worker-elected council members of this firm said that, though the management members on the council were co-operative, the other managers did not want to implement the council's decisions since they found that the council was not dealing with decision making. One manager stated that if the council gained real power he would incite his fellow managers to work to rule. In yet another enterprise the worker-elected council members complained that if they made a proposal that management disliked, 'management started to scream that the workers are taking over'.

A host of other matters helping or hindering effective participation were mentioned by the works councillors. The majority of them stated they had a copy of the Industrial Relations Act, mostly provided by management; in some cases elected works councillors had to buy one themselves. Most had also received one

form or another of education. Of the 33 worker-elected council members, 19 had attended one or more educational programmes (at the President Citizenship College, the Zimco Institute of Management, the Institute of Personnel Management, the Industrial Participatory Democracy Department or incidental seminars at various institutions). In one firm all council members had attended an education programme, in most of them some and in only a few none.

Council members complained of the lack of facilities. In one company the worker members were refused office space, even if only wanting to have a one-hour meeting to consult each other. They were afraid to meet informally, since if management came to know about it, they felt they risked dismissal. It was also difficult to consult minutes of previous meetings. Normally the minutes were kept in the personnel manager's office and workers hesitated to ask for them. The constitution of the council and the procedures for the council agreed upon by the working party were sometimes not available (or had been misplaced). Such shortcomings were particularly felt when a newly elected council had to start its work. In some companies there was a handing-over ceremony during which the incoming members were briefed by the outgoing ones – but in many others the worker-elected members had to find their own way. Sometimes, the outgoing members were not prepared to brief them.

#### *Works councils and trade unions*

Co-operation between works councils and trade unions had been stated as one of the objectives of the Industrial Relations Act (IRA, section 69). The trade union was represented by four out of eight representatives in a working party which had to prepare for the efficient functioning of the council: explaining the purpose and functions of the council, classifying 'eligible employees', determining the number of council members and playing distinct roles in nominations and in the actual elections. After the first elections, the working party was dissolved. The trade union had to approve the candidates' nomination; in case of disapproval, set procedures had to be followed.

Once the works council became operational, it found itself in a confusing situation vis-à-vis the trade union. Issues dealt with by both trade union and council overlapped, as is immediately clear when one reads the list of items on the agenda reported above. In particular, the items brought on the agenda by the worker-elected council members are almost word-for-word the prime goals of trade union activity, directly or indirectly. In a number of cases it was reported that the council and the works committee (the workplace-level trade union structure) were handling the same issue at the same time. In such cases management pushed for an agreement in the council and the trade union was then informed that a resolution had been adopted so that the matter was closed. These overlaps occurred on such important matters like housing, transport and bonus.

Such an overlap not only led to duplication of representation, it was often experienced as having a negative affect. Once the works council approved a policy on a certain issue or passed a consultative resolution, it could pre-empt trade union action on that issue. The trade union could only follow up an issue which in its view was unsatisfactorily decided by the council – and only if that issue fell under the

current collective agreement. If not, room for manoeuvring by the unions was very small. Trade union representatives stated they had regretted passing on certain issues to the council. They found themselves in an awkward position later on: the union was held responsible by the workers for the 'failure' of the council. Frictions then started to grow between the worker representatives on the council and on the trade union works committee. The council members said they were not allowed to disclose the business information provided by management to justify a negative outcome to a request. This put management in an advantageous position: the personnel manager dealt with both the council and the works committee – so that he/she held all the information and could play out council and committee.

The reasons for overlap are not only to be sought in the complexity of the legislation. Management was sometimes actively pushing issues to the council. In one (private) company the trade union representatives said that all issues raised by them were transferred to the council. As soon as they contacted management on an issue, management put it on the agenda of the next council meeting and the role of the union could then be finished. In this company, the chairperson of the works committee had tried several times to see the general manager in order to insist that the union continue to deal with its own business, but was not given an appointment. In such a case the works council was being used as a shield against the trade union (Kester 1984).

This company may have been an exceptional case, but many council members as well as trade union representatives reported that in their companies management was weighing which of the two was weaker – the council or the trade union – and would deal with the issue there. These management tactics were also facilitated by the lack of co-operation and, at times, by the competition between the works council and the works committee. These conflicts between the two systems of representation were visible from time to time in the cases before the Industrial Relations Court, whose members told in interviews that it was the trade unions who did not give enough room to the works councils to play their part. In the interviews trade union representatives complained, however, that council members were 'stealing' issues from the union if they thought they could score some result and if the issues were popular among the workers. Sometimes trade union representatives were outrightly bitter about the lack of co-operation with the worker-elected council members. Their bitterness was also caused by the fact, as they said, that once a union issue 'disappeared' in the council, its members would not inform the trade union of the outcome of the discussions in the council and would 'hide behind confidentiality'. A number of trade union representatives pleaded that council members and union representatives should 'stop outwit[ting] and outmanoeuvr[ing] each other ... management sits on the fence and encourages our conflict'.

In a number of companies co-operation and division of tasks were very well achieved. In one company it was reported that worker-elected council members and the trade union were regularly consulting each other. Before they would bring an issue to either council or negotiation they would agree among themselves. Policy matters were ushered to the council and matters of implementation of policy to the union. Where the council failed, the union was asked to take over. Two concrete examples were given. In order to obtain better funeral assistance, the matter was

discussed in the council and a resolution adopted. (Such a resolution remains information for management; it does not have to be implemented.) The council passed the resolution on to the union which adopted it as part of its own policy, and was able to get it implemented in the next collective agreement. In the same enterprise the council discussed an expiring collective agreement, item by item. The worker-elected members evaluated the terms of the agreement in the perspective of the information about the company's economic position. After the meeting the worker-elected council members prepared a written report to the trade union for its negotiations for the next collective agreement.

But these examples were the exception rather than the rule. Most representatives, though initially stating they were co-operating very well, said they did not consult each other (either council or works committee) before putting their items on the agenda of forthcoming meetings.<sup>7</sup> More strikingly, council members never attended a works committee meeting and committee members were never invited to attend a works council meeting. There was also no exchange of minutes.

A further difference between the two types of worker representatives is their accountability to the rank-and-file workers. Elections for both works council and works committee positions were very heavily contested and mobilised the majority of the workers to vote. The trade union representatives were closer to the workers through regular trade union meetings whereas the works council organised a general meeting only once a year. Also, the trade union representatives could be removed from their representative positions in cases where the members were not satisfied. The works councillors could not, as there was no procedure of recall. It appeared in the group interviews that the worker-elected councillors had more background knowledge, were better able to express themselves and knew the Industrial Relations Act better. More strikingly, six of the 33 works councillors had been works committee members before, whereas none of the 46 works committee members had been works councillors before. Taking the impression of facts and role-shifting together, it would appear that leadership of workers at enterprise level was creamed off in favour of the works councils. This conclusion was strengthened by the fact that half of the six former works committee members were now chairpersons of the works councils. The persons who shifted from a trade union representative role to council membership said they did so because they expected the council to be more influential, because discussions with management were to be on the basis of company information, and because questions of policy could be jointly discussed. Even when, as stated earlier, the council members were unhappy with the functioning of the council, they expected that their power would eventually increase. The council members who shifted from union to council found the meetings of the council more serious than those of the works committee. In the council, there was always an agenda, the meetings were properly minuted and minutes were submitted for approval, matters arising were discussed, and the minutes were filed. Such things left much to be desired in the case of works committees, according to these persons with experience on both sides.

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<sup>7</sup> And as discussed earlier, this consultation can be important, since once a matter is dealt with in a council meeting it cannot be easily taken up by the trade union later on.

By assigning the role of industrial opposition to the trade union and the role of co-operation to works councils, the unions were exhibited as the champions of antagonism and the works councils as the champions of reasonableness. Leading the attack on the trade unions was the Department of Industrial Participatory Democracy, which described the general attitude of the trade unions towards works councils as 'indifferent and unfavourable' (Mwiya 1979, 227). It had been pointed out in one of the earlier studies on works councils that the trade union had indeed shown hesitation about supporting works councils (*ibid.*, 226), but that these hesitations were in respect of the practice, format and institutional setting and not about opposing the idea of participation (*ibid.*, 231).

... The trade union, more than any other organisation, had practically demonstrated its commitment to the promotion and development of the programs of workers' participation by devoting a substantial amount of its resources to seminars, courses and visits to places of work, all geared towards the inculcation of knowledge, of facts and skills about the Industrial Relations Act in general and workers' participation in particular. This is a clear demonstration of the union's commitment to the programme of workers' participation (*ibid.*).

Under the leadership of Frederic Chiluba, the then ZCTU President, the trade union stated it was in favour of participation, but did not want to commit itself to the way worker participation was implemented. In an interview,<sup>8</sup> Chiluba stated that the ZCTU should keep a low profile on worker participation as it existed and as it was manipulated by Kaunda's political party. In particular, Chiluba feared participation was being used as an instrument to integrate the trade union into the party and, if this did not succeed, to create a worker representation framework outside the trade union which, if given more power, could eventually weaken or kill the trade union movement altogether. Eventually, ZCTU distanced itself from participation politics and concentrated fully on traditional trade union activity: collective bargaining and negotiations on working conditions. President Kaunda continued to pursue the 'transition to self-management' policy. With financial aid of the ILO, full worker self-management was introduced in two pilot enterprises in the early 1990s, an experiment that eventually failed. Also, in this adventure the ZCTU refused co-operation as it saw the experiment as a party show-piece instead of as something in the interests of the workers who were, according to ZCTU, denied their most essential rights, 'so why lure them into schemes they never asked for'.<sup>9</sup> The dispute between the President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, and the ZCTU president Frederic Chiluba became increasingly bitter, and eventually the trade union-party conflict grew into a major showdown where the ZCTU decided to found a political party (the Movement of Multi-Party Democracy or MMD) in order to oust the Kaunda regime and its one-party system. Chiluba won the 1992 general elections and became Zambia's new President. Worker participation, as introduced and legislated under the Kaunda regime, ended.

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8 Interview with Frederic Chiluba, August 1984.

9 This explanation was given to the author in interviews with ZCTU leadership in 1992.



## Experience with Workers' Councils in Tanzania

Worker participation in Tanzania has already been referred to in Chapter 2, where the history of 'mobilising participation' was reviewed. Unlike Zambia, the workplace participation institutions created in the 1970s in Tanzania have remained widely operational in the public sector and also in the era of political democratisation; and they were still functioning at the time of writing. The Tanzania APADEP team conducted a series of case studies in the 1990s and these may be summarised as follows.

In the form of workers' committees, workers' participation has existed since 1952 (Chambua 2002, 40–4) but the major landmark was the Presidential Circular No. 1 in 1970, which was to give shape and content to Tanzania's labour relations in the perspective of its policy of socialism and self-reliance, aiming at involving workers in the management of the enterprises where they worked. The major objectives of the 'worker participation circular' were: to give the working class power, to allow workers' involvement in deciding the affairs of their lives and in the development process of their enterprises and to increase efficiency in the socialised firms. The presidential directive stipulated that in all public corporations employing more than 10 workers, a workers' council, a workers' council executive committee, and a board of directors had to be formed (*ibid.*, 44). A year later this presidential circular was further strengthened by the party guidelines of 1971 (referred to as *Mwongozo*) in which the ruling party formulated the following principles for labour relations: increase the say of peasants and workers in determining their own affairs, build equality among people and 'to eliminate the attitude of bossism and the habit of relying on issuing commands, to eliminate false consciousness and instil a sense of security and responsibility among both leaders and workers' (*ibid.*, 47).

The workers' council was to be composed as follows: the general manager (at least in the beginning years) in the chair, all heads of departments or sections, all members of the enterprise trade union committee, representatives from all departments or section elected by the workers themselves and a representative of the trade union (for further description, see *ibid.*, 45). As these workers' councils were initiated from above by the single political party, and as they were expected to operate within the spirit of the party's guidelines, also the chairman of the party branch of the enterprise was to be a council member and persons running for election by workers had to be party members. The functions of the council

... were mainly advisory to the Board on such issues as: government wages policy, marketing of goods and services, quality and quantity of the goods and products produced and services rendered. The council was also empowered to discuss and analyse the balance sheet of the enterprise and advise on planning as a whole and on all relevant aspects of production (*ibid.*).

In essence, the workers' council was the 'participatory linchpin' between management and the board of directors of a company. Proposals to the board were to be submitted to the workers' council for advice. The documents and proceedings of the workers' council were confidential, and no member of the workers' council was

allowed to disclose information, except after receiving directions from the workers' council itself.

The workers' council executive committee was to be composed as follows: the general manager in the chair, heads of departments or sections, and worker representatives delegated by the workers' council, the latter maximally one third of the total membership. The main function of the executive committee was to scrutinise the reports and proposals furnished both by the management and the workers' council on matters concerning finance, production, productivity, promotion, training programmes, marketing and the daily running of the enterprise. The President of the Republic appointed the chair of the board of directors, and the relevant Minister the other board members, of whom one at least should be from the trade union (*ibid.*, 46). The participatory structure in each enterprise was established by an agreement between the management and the trade union, taking the provisions of the presidential directive into account. In practice, these agreements normally were similar, as at the trade union headquarters a standardised format was made.

Four case studies were conducted in Tanzania on the functioning of workers councils and to assess to what extent worker participation was meaningful, effective and democratic. The first was a pilot study, conducted in 1992, in a state enterprise (wholly government-owned) in Mbeya (West Tanzania) producing farm tools, employing 271 workers. The exercise was to test the methodology of the case studies and to provide on-the-job training to the researchers, although it was a study in its own right. The second was a case study of a fishnet company in Dar es Salaam, jointly (fifty-fifty) owned by the Workers' Development Corporation of the then exclusive trade union federation OTTU, and private shareholders. The study was conducted in 1993–94. The third case study was conducted in 1994 in a parastatal firm in Morogoro producing canvas, with a workforce of 1,032. The fourth study covered two sugar estates in the Morogoro region and was conducted in 1995. All four case studies used the following research techniques to collect data:

- interviews with management, with elected worker representatives, and with rank-and-file workers
- the study of relevant documents such as agendas and minutes of workers' councils, financial and other reports on the enterprise studied
- observations by the researchers and attending live meetings of workers' councils or of management.

#### *The farm tools-producing enterprise in Mbeya*<sup>10</sup>

The participatory structures in this company were created through an agreement between the trade union branch and management, in the framework of the presidential directive of 1970 referred to above. The workers' council had 27 members. The general manager and the heads of departments had six seats, the trade union branch committee 14, and five members were directly elected by the employees in the different departments. The chair of the enterprise committee of the sole political

10 For a full report, see Musa 1992, later published in summarised form in Musa 1994.

party (CCM) and a member of the OTTU district office each had one seat. Of the 27 members, three were women, two came from among the management, and one from the trade union committee. The general manager of the company was chairperson of the workers' council from its inception, and after ten years the financial manager took this position.

The workers' council executive committee was also composed as stipulated in the presidential directive: chaired by the general manager, with all heads of departments and a maximum of one third elected by the workers' council. This committee is supposed to meet to prepare the workers' council meeting, and is supposed to scrutinise and advise the workers' council on various issues and to follow up the implementation of the workers' council decisions. But the committee did not meet before the workers' council here in question, and apparently did not meet regularly anyway. Over the previous three years, the committee met only once. Yet, the researchers of the case study observed, the general manager and the heads of departments had met the day before the workers' council meeting reported above, to prepare for that meeting (Musa 1992, 20).

There was one trade union representative on the board of directors. He was from outside the company, delegated by the regional office of the trade union. In an interview he declared his role was to take the workers' side, but he did not know much of the problems of the company and was not aware of the achievements of the workers' council in the last five years. The general manager of the company was the chair of the workers' council and also a member of the board. Also, the heads of departments attend the board meetings. This gives the senior management of the company a comparative advantage over workers, who have no representative of their own on the board (*ibid.*, 21–2).

In the case study two researchers were allowed to attend a workers' council meeting. Their report is extensively described in the case study publication and may be summarised as follows.

The members of the workers' council received the council documents the afternoon before the meeting, instead of two weeks ahead as is stipulated in the presidential circular. They received the agenda and the company plan 15 minutes before the meeting started. The reasons given for late delivery were: information received too late from department heads, and poor typing facilities. The company plan (main document) is in English, with a brief summary in Swahili. Some council members were going through the materials in the hotel hall just before the meeting started and still others were going through them during the meeting itself.

The meeting started at 09.30 and ended at 19.00, with a two-hour lunch break. The meeting was held at a hotel, with meals and refreshments being served throughout the day. Each member received an allowance for the sitting.

Four items were on the agenda:

- confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting
- matters arising
- company plan 1992–96
- any other business.

The general manager presented the company plan and apologised it was in English but, upon request of a worker representative, presented the plan orally in Swahili. After presentation of the plan one council member complained that the documents were sent only a day before the meeting so that there was no time to go through them. In the debate following the presentation it was mostly the same small group of council members to intervene, some other members were hardly awake. The atmosphere of the meeting was generally friendly but could turn difficult, for instance when the issue of overtime pay was debated. Questions and comments of council members included the following topics: advantages of affiliation to the National Development Council, customers indebted to the company, price increases, product marketing, opening of a retail shop, purchase and rehabilitation of machines, capital expenditure, budget allocations, advertisement, support for sport clubs, sales, salary advances and salaries, workers' loans, workers' leave and illness, working time, communication and transport problems, collection of accounts receivable, overtime, bonuses, production targets, product quality control, workers' training, purchase of raw materials, storage, vehicles maintenance, scheme of service.

Following the comments, the general manager asked if anyone objected to the approval of the company plan, and the council members unanimously decided to pass the plan as it was to the board of directors. After that, detailed production targets of each departments were discussed (Musa 1992, 14–19).

Besides the workers' council there is another, informal, occasion for participation in so-called general meetings of all employees and management. Such meetings are held three to four times per year to discuss current problems. They last two to three hours and are organised by the trade union committee and chaired by the general manager. The heads of department have to respond to issues raised by workers. At departmental level such meetings also take place regularly.

The researchers point at many weaknesses in the functioning and results of the workers' council, including their restriction to an advisory role, strong management influence in the proceedings of the council, the confidentiality of the council's work so that the rank-and-file workers have no information nor control over what the council does, and so on (*ibid.*, 24–8). Yet they conclude 'that worker participation in the company is not completely meaningless and ineffective', and list the main achievements of the last five years as follows:

- securing payment of workers' salaries on regular basis
- getting a litre of milk
- providing medicine through a dispensary
- putting more pressure on management to provide training opportunities for workers
- easing transport problems with the company bus
- provision of sport facilities (sports club and sport equipment) (Musa 1992, 29).

The researchers also conclude that human relations have improved as a result. Previously, senior management had taken separate lunch meals in the board room whereas there were many worker complaints about the food and canteen facilities available to them. The matter was raised in the workers' council and the argument used that only if all had to depend on the canteen in the same way would improvements be made: senior management should accept eating the same food as the workers. This

was accepted and implemented, and softened the conventional boss–subordinate relationship. It was also considered important that, whatever the result, getting inside information on the company made workers aware of the good and bad sides of the firm they were working in (*ibid.*, 29–30).

*A fishnet enterprise in Dar es Salaam*<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the public firm in Mbeya reported above, this company was jointly owned by the trade union and a number of Tanzanian businessmen and enjoyed managerial autonomy. Business and policy decisions are made within the company; the board of directors and the meeting of shareholders have the highest authority.

In the era of upcoming interest in worker participation in the 1960s, the then existing trade union federation NUTA deliberately wanted to play a role in the development of worker participation, as one of its main responsibilities was to promote such participation in all sectors. When most companies were nationalised in the 1960s following the Arusha Declaration, the owners of the fishnet company sought the co-operation of the union in becoming co-shareholder, and the latter agreed to show that workers' councils could also play their role in private industry. The presidential directive for workers' councils was voluntarily applied to this private firm (Musa et al. 1997, 318).

At the time of the case study the workers' council counted 28 members, of which nine were from management: the general manager, four heads of departments and four assistant heads of department; there were also 15 members of the trade union committee, three worker-elected members and one delegate from OTTU's headquarters. Management was thus represented with four extra members, as the provisions in the directive allowed only the heads of department, not their deputies.

On the functioning of the workers' council the researchers report the following (*ibid.*, 319–26):

The information sent to the workers' council is the same as that prepared for the board of directors. The information is in English and contains the following documents for one council meeting analysed:

- agenda
- minutes of previous meeting
- management report on provisional account for year ended
- detailed financial statement, that is, the balance sheet and the profit/loss account for the year ended
- the general manager's report on the problems encountered in the past year and the corrective measures taken to solve them
- the executive summary of the budget
- details of components of the budget including the production plan, the raw materials requirements, sales plan, revenue and expenditure, projected profit/loss account, projected balance sheet and cash flow statement.

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11 See the full text on this case study in Musa et al. 1997.

Most managers received the information one or two weeks before the meeting date. This information was used during the management task force meeting which preceded the council meeting. In the case studied, the non-management council members received the information two days before the council meeting, which officially should be two weeks in advance. Few persons complained about this. Some more educated members said they thus did not have enough time to prepare for the meeting but, according to the researchers, late information did not make much difference for most as they did not understand English and were not able to digest the information anyway. The trade union committee had never complained about the English professional language of the documents 'mostly because they are shy to admit they cannot understand them' (*ibid.*, 322).

The researchers made a listing of the range of issues discussed during the past three years of council meetings, analysing the agendas, the minutes, and interviewing council members. This following list resulted (*ibid.*, 323): '... financial performance, salary, production performance, workers' housing, solution of company problems, *Godowan* Lease, stationery, voluntary agreement on long-service award, annual budget, uniforms, electricity crisis, warehouse (storage), debt collection (debtors), National Provident Fund, share capital, hygiene, raw material position, referral of patients, company vehicles, profits, transport for department heads, machine replacement, burial expenses, on-duty allowance, audited accounts, theft, sales/marketing, netting operators, security guards, dispensary, canteen, incentives, sitting allowance of workers' council members, food, medicines, workers' transport, workers' loans.'

Interpreting this list the researchers observe that strategic decisions such as pricing, investment, profit allocation, appointment of directors, approval of final accounts and appointment of external auditors were not discussed in the council. The issues mainly focused on production and financial issues, and on workers' welfare issues. The first group of issues was on the agenda but not really discussed: 'According to the members of the council, the budget and the financial statements were always approved by consensus and without amendment. This indicates that these items are taken for granted and are merely rubber stamped. Thus, it appears that the discussion of the relevant documents is only symbolic and a required nuisance' (*ibid.*, 320).

Worker representatives on the council used their opportunity to air and defend workers' welfare interests vigorously: 'Thus, although worker representatives may not be able to understand and analyse balance sheets or profit/loss accounts, there is no doubt they understand they are there in the council to fight for better salaries, hygiene, transport, food, and other worker needs ... when it comes to the workers' welfare, they fight every inch of the way' (*ibid.*, 324-5). At the time of the research they were adamant to maintain the services of the workers' bus and were successful: the company plan to sell the bus was called off.

The majority of the council members described the atmosphere of the council meetings as friendly, most decisions were made by consensus, voting was rare. Sometimes a deadlock was reached, like in the case of the sale of the workers' bus (see above), and then the case was referred for further consideration. Here the weakness of the workers' council is exposed, as there is no representation of the workers on the board of directors where final decisions are made.

*The canvas mill in Morogoro*<sup>12</sup>

The canvas mill was for a long time a state-owned firm with a contracted expatriate management team. At the time of the case study it had been taken into the Parastatal Sector Reform programme which was formed to deal with the selling of public institutions to private entrepreneurs or to arrange for joint ventures with the private sector. The company was for sale and eventually became a private enterprise.

The participation structure of the firm was set up in line with the presidential directive and the standardised management–trade union agreement. The workers' council counted 34 members: the general manager, seven department managers, 20 members of the company trade union committee, and seven elected representatives from each department. In this case two of the department-elected persons were also members of the trade union committee. Only two workers' council members were female. The general manager had always been the chair of the workers' council: '... the expectation was that if the general manager was the chair, the council's decisions will be binding' (Chambua and Semkiwa 1994, 21). As chair of the workers' council executive committee the general manager prepares the council's agenda.

Also, for this case the researchers gave ample information on the functioning of the workers' council, and their reports may be summarised as follows.

The members of the workers' council normally received the information only one day before the meeting: 'Late receipt of information was a hindrance to the effective participation of worker representatives. The practice of giving information to them only one day before the meeting had two main but related limitations. One, there was not enough time to digest the issues to be discussed and thus participate effectively. Two, there was hardly any time for workers' representatives to consult other workers on what was to be discussed at the council meeting' (Chambua 2002, 60). Management, on the other hand, came fully prepared and presumably with a prior stand on the matters to be discussed. Another serious problem noticed in this case study was that its members did not go through the minutes and approve them, before they went to the board of directors: 'it was the general manager who did that' (*ibid.*).

Management has been able to utilise the existing participatory structures to inform the workers about the financial and other problems confronting the enterprise. In so doing, they have successfully restrained workers from calling strikes. These participatory forums were also used to educate workers on the importance of taking proper care to safeguard the equipment of the company, as they (the workers) are an integral part of the company. Therefore, worker participation imparted to the workers the sense of belonging to the company, and the need to protect and defend not only the interests of the workers but also those of the company as a whole (Chambua and Semkiwa 1994, 28–9).

The achievements of the workers' council would appear to favour management rather than the workers. Managers declared they believed the company benefited well from worker participation: grievances could be aired, industrial harmony was maintained and the workers had been imparted with a sense of belonging to the

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12 For a full report, see Chambua and Semkiwa 1994; later published in summary in Chambua 2002.

company and looking at the interests of the company as a whole. The majority of the worker representatives acknowledged they were able to reap some benefits from participation (a mid-month non-refundable 50 per cent salary allowance, loan advances during public holidays, getting reject materials) but were not satisfied with what they had achieved (Chambua 2002, 63–4).

The researchers concluded that, although a wide range of issues was discussed in the workers' council, there was no effective worker participation in the firm. The only consultative nature of the council's decisions, the minority position of worker representatives in the workers' council executive committee which drew up the council agenda, the fact that the general manager presided over the works council as well as over the works council executive committee, the absence of worker representation on the board where all strategic decisions were made, the (too) late availability of documents – 'it all adds up to one conclusion: management has hijacked worker participation in the firm' (*ibid.*, 62), as has already been observed for the Mbeya case (see above). The researchers go on to say that the rank-and-file workers they interviewed showed more enthusiasm for the general assemblies, even when the atmosphere was sometimes tense when management was challenged; but they were happy with the way in which these meetings were conducted and found them valuable and informative (*ibid.*, 61).

### *Two sugar plants in the Morogoro district*<sup>13</sup>

The previous three case studies had come up with rather disappointing conclusions about the effectiveness of worker participation. The research team decided to dedicate the last case study in the series to two enterprises that had the reputation of having strong workers' councils, namely the Kilombero Sugar Company and the Mtibwa Sugar Estates, in the Morogoro region. The researchers also wanted to 'cover' the exploration of worker participation experience in the agricultural sector (Chambua et al. 1995, iii, 1).

The study extended to three cases: two separate plants belonging to the sugar company, and the sugar estate that provided the sugar cane to these two plants. Each of these units had its own workers' council, and the two plants of the sugar company had one central enterprise workers' council, which was composed of the three councils put together. The composition of all three workers' councils and the central one was similar to the one described for the previous cases: the general manager plus the heads of departments, the entire trade union committee of the company, and members directly elected by the workers of each department. In the sugar company each department had, in addition, its own departmental workers' council. And each council had its workers' council executive committee as stipulated in the presidential directive (*ibid.*, 34–6).

In several respects, worker participation operated in ways different from the previous cases. The workers' councils were under the chair of the general manager only during the first year, but later another chairperson was elected from among the worker representatives. The council secretary was not elected from within, but a

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13 For a full report, see Chambua et al. 1995.



procedure was used to elect one from three 'technical' candidates, so that the council would have a competent secretary (*ibid.*, 37). The councils of the sugar company met four times a year. According to interviews with worker representatives on the councils, the issues normally discussed in the council were: production plans and targets, budget and investment plans, work problems, social welfare, efficiency and incentives. Production issues constituted 79 per cent of the items mentioned, welfare and incentive issues 21 per cent (figures derived from *ibid.*, 38).

In this case study an opinion survey was conducted among 22 management representatives and 32 worker representatives on the works councils, as well as among 59 rank-and-file workers, using interviews with a structured questionnaire. The results may be summarised as follows. For all three categories interviewed, worker participation was associated foremost with worker involvement in decision making and freedom of expression. The worker representatives and workers further emphasised co-operation between management, unions and workers, and management 'giving workers greater responsibility'. The different emphases, from management on the one hand and workers on the other, became clearer when the respondents were asked what they found the main aims of the councils. All mentioned 'good industrial relations' most of all but specified these differently. The worker representatives and rank and file again put much emphasis on involvement in decision making, but management saw as an aim 'that workers should have a sense of belonging', 'to know what workers say about the company' and 'to educate and inform the workers' (Chambua et al. 1995, 39–44).

The most important achievements, according to the worker representatives, were: increased productivity and efficiency, increased benefits and/or salaries, stability and harmony, and the creation of a forum to air views and complaints. For the rank-and-file workers the outstanding achievement mentioned was increased benefits and salaries, the solution of worker problems and the airing of worker views. Management listed a different list of main achievements: increased productivity and industrial harmony and stability (*ibid.*, 41–2). Management saw the lack of education of workers' council members as the main obstacle to the good functioning of the councils, but worker representatives and workers listed many other obstacles: management rigidity, ineffectiveness of council decisions, too few meetings and lack of legal backing (*ibid.*, 43).

### **Experience with Works Councils in Zimbabwe**

Formalised worker participation was introduced much later in Zimbabwe than in Zambia and Tanzania, but was also introduced from above with a 'mobilising' agenda. Under the APADEP programme, three case studies were conducted in the 1990s, and these were eventually published in 2001.<sup>14</sup>

Also, in Zimbabwe the idea of worker participation was mooted by the political leaders as an instrument to bring about structural change, as appears from documents prepared by ZANU well before independence (Schiphorst 2001, 187). Upon taking

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<sup>14</sup> Schiphorst 2001; see in particular pages 185–346 for an overview of worker participation in Zimbabwe and for a description and analysis of the three case studies.

power, the post-colonial government started to intervene in labour relations, among others by creating a new Congress of Trade Unions and by 'supplementing' unions with other forms of worker representation. In its 'workers' committee guidelines' of 1981, the composition, aim and function of workers' committees (with exclusively worker representatives) were spelt out, and a model constitution for a works council (joint management and worker representation) presented in an annex. These documents left no doubt as to the aims of worker participation: humanise social relations and increase productivity. In later political discourse (roughly until the mid-1980s), the aims of worker participation were dressed up in a transformation perspective, with the final aim to reach self-management and worker control. But this progressive political discourse eventually petered out and the above-mentioned guidelines of 1981 remained the frame of reference for worker participation in the years after (*ibid.*, 190–200).<sup>15</sup>

The workers' committees and works councils were beset by many problems, as is shown by empirical studies.<sup>16</sup> The councils were based on guidelines and had no force of law (and were in conflict with the Companies Act, which denied any control over property other than by the owners); they operated at plant level whereas important decisions were taken at higher levels; and the councils could only deal with productivity and welfare issues, and not with wages, grading, financial management, appropriation or control.

Relations between workers' committees and trade unions were also problematic from the beginning. Traditionally, the Zimbabwe trade unions were organised in towns or local communities rather than at the workplace, but they were keen to gain their place in collective bargaining at plant and higher levels, and found the workers' committees in their way. This competition over the representation of workers was awkward for the trade unions who, inevitably, became keen to criticise the government-initiated committees (*ibid.*, 229).

### *Background to the case studies*

The trade unions were confronted with a *fait accompli* when the 1981 guidelines were given legal status in the Labour Relations Amendment Act in 1992. The works council was given powers surpassing those of trade unions, also powers in the traditional areas of trade union activity: collective bargaining and grievance handling. In addition an increasing number of Zimbabwean managers began, in the 1990s, to introduce Japanese human resource management methods, including the involvement of workers in decision making of their daily work (Schiphorst 2001, 231–8).

One of the main focuses of the trade union was on the National Employment Council (NEC), where annual wage increases were negotiated with the Employers' Association. The bargaining agreements reached apply, as minima, to the industry as

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15 This 'evolution' of ideas around worker participation is extensively described in the work of Schiphorst, who also examines the trade union and management positions in the discourse on participation (Schiphorst 2001, 201–21).

16 Referred to by Schiphorst 2001, 224.

a whole. But there is room to go over and above this, depending on the company's ability to pay and, of course, the ability to bargain from the side of the workers. In practice, the initiative may come from management itself (benevolence), from trade union bargaining with a company, but also through initiatives by the workers' committee or the works council. Another area of overlap between trade unions and forums of worker participation is the code of conduct, which provides disciplinary rules and procedures in case of a breach of these rules. Such a code can be negotiated by trade union and employers at the NEC, but also at enterprise level in the works council. The latter legally prevails over the former. As soon as the code of conduct was introduced by law, most employers were quick to act and introduced them through the works councils (*ibid.*, 326).

The case studies were undertaken in the light of these developments, and had three main emphases: an assessment of the functioning of the workers' committees and the works councils, the relationship between these two participatory institutions and trade unions, and the relationship between workers' committees and management initiated forms of worker participation. Three cases were selected that enabled the study of these three main themes. The first case covered two plants of Apex, a conglomerate of 33 plants, all under private ownership. One of these plants was a non-unionised firm in Harare producing tents, tarpaulins and flags, employing around 180 people; the other was a foundry in Gweru, employing 280 people (and contracting an additional 100 to 200 casual unskilled labourers), with a very active trade union and an equally militant workers' committee. The second case was a privately owned Dunlop tyre plant in Bulawayo, employing over 900 people. Dunlop had an in-house enterprise-based trade union and a well-organised workers' committee representing the workers. The third case was a printing enterprise, Natprint, a division of Zimbabwe Newspapers in which the government of Zimbabwe holds a controlling share. Natprint had two factories (factory I employing around 250 and factory II around 150 people), both in Harare. A fluctuating number of the employees were unionised in a national trade union affiliated to ZCTU (*ibid.*, 238–318).

### *The Apex case study*

The Apex group of companies had a broad policy of worker participation. All plants had workers' committees and works councils as demanded by law. The chairperson of the workers' committee attended all weekly management meetings. The company had one worker director on its board (elected by an annual meeting of all chairpersons of the 33 workers' committees), had an employee share participation and a profit-sharing scheme, and a KPS system and quality task forces as human resource techniques.

The Harare plant had a workers' committee of seven members elected from the seven sections of the factory. The chairperson and the secretary were elected from among these seven. The workers' committee prepared the works council meetings. This council was composed of four management representatives (the chief executive, the works manager, the personnel manager and either the financial or the marketing manager, and four delegates of the workers' committee (normally the chairperson and secretary and two members). The works council meetings were chaired alternately

by the chief executive and the workers' committee chairperson. The committee and the council functioned as follows:

The workers committee meets in the canteen: a small section of that canteen (small in itself) is partitioned with curtains. This is the workers' committee domain: six tables and benches between the walls covered by charts indicating the company's production targets. ... Meetings are during lunch time although management claims that the workers can meet whenever they want. Members of the committee feel, however, that production would be jeopardised if they would meet during regular working hours. And that would endanger meeting the production targets that in turn would affect their and their colleagues' bonuses. The meetings of the workers' committee are all in preparation of the works council. ... The workers' committee draws up a list of issues that the workers want to discuss and these are submitted to management for circulation. There has not been any problem in getting these issues subsequently on the agenda of the council (Schiphorst, 2001, 249).

The works council meets irregularly, 'sometimes there is one every month for three months in a row, then for four months nothing'. The meeting usually lasts no more than one hour. 'The issues workers bring to the meeting vary from the contribution of the company to funeral costs, the quality of toilets, renewal of protective clothing, company transport, including the allocation of the company car to individuals, and long service awards. In almost every meeting over the past four years improvements (renovations and repair) to the canteen have been discussed, apparently with little success'. The issues management bring for discussion are 'cleanliness in the factory, productivity measurements including the bonus system, the lack of support given to management by the chairperson of the workers' committee, the introduction of quality circles, the just-in-time scheme, and finally of total quality circles'. Leave arrangements and disciplinary actions are also discussed in the council. The financial manager usually presents information on the viability of the company, and once a year salaries and wages are reviewed (*ibid.*, 249–50).

In the subsequent descriptions in the study it transpires that worker participation was set in the perspective of a productivity campaign by management. The chairperson of the workers' committee who attended the weekly management meetings was supposed to convey information on productivity to fellow workers during lunch time, and production target charts hung all over the place and informed the workers of the relation between increase in profits and bonus. Apex run instructors courses on quality circles, and the trainers gave a two-day course on it to everyone in the firm, from chief executive to sweeper. 'All this has led to the almost unquestionable acceptance by the workers of managerial logic and the profit bonus is the icing on this ideological cake' (*ibid.*, 253). Upon election, the worker director on the board 'received a suit and a tie, so as not to fall out of line during a board meeting'. When interviewed he declared that 'the other directors spoke above his head and he was afraid to lose his job if he did speak out' (*ibid.*, 253–4). He could not report about what went on in the board as that was confidential information, and thus could not liaise with worker representatives on committees nor councils. In sum, 'he helped to let Apex pose as a good and considerate employer' (*ibid.*, 257).

Unlike the Apex plant in Harare, where workers were not unionised, at the Apex plant in Gweru 60 per cent of the workers with a contract were members of a very active trade union. And the workers' committee appeared very active as

well, with 13 members elected from as many departments of the company. Ten of the elected persons were union members. The workers' committee met during tea or lunch breaks, sending the chairperson and secretary plus two rotating members to the works council, where the issues discussed look much like those discussed in the plant as reported above: from funeral donations to the construction of a toilet, from long-service awards to the quality of the food served in the canteen (*ibid.*, 265). The workers' committee was unhappy as it felt that worker issues were not addressed in the council or kept permanently on the agenda. In particular, the committee resented the fact that the company refused to pay rates agreed upon in the National Employment Council. When all bargaining efforts of the committee failed, all members of the committee resigned because they felt they were not being taken seriously; this step was welcomed and supported by the workers of the company (*ibid.*, 266). This case merits further description as it illustrates the frustration of the worker representatives.

The workers' committee members wrote a letter to the Apex administration with copies to the Ministry of Labour and the trade union, in which they listed their reasons for their resignation, stating for instance 'our existence as worker representatives serves no purpose if we cannot discuss issues that directly affect workers', and accusing management to live comfortably at the workers' expense: 'they alone live in company-paid houses, and drive in company cars, which are also company fuel-filled, their children's fees are paid for by the company and they receive entertainment allowances'. They further explained how they were not listened to and did not receive the true information on the company, '... we are mere tokens or should it be called a farce?' Management reacted by first trying, in vain, to organise elections for a new committee, then to address all workers, but few people turned up as workers were backing up the resigned committee members. Then the general secretary of the trade union federation intervened, invited by the workers' committee, in an attempt to negotiate a solution with the Apex Group human resource director (both had come from Harare to Gweru), but no agreement was reached. Thereupon, the Apex director wrote a letter to the workers' committee stating that the company would pay the current minimum wage but stop with immediate effect all Apex bonuses and awards. The workers were not impressed: 'all this is very little, why stick to it?' The union general secretary wrote a letter to management stating the arrears claims and asking rectification. Thereupon the Apex director visited the Gweru plant again to come to terms with the workers' committee, and many grievances were redressed. For instance, it was agreed that no issue on the works council agenda could stay on for two months without being finalised. Also issues regarding communication, promotion, school loans, housing, information on the financial state of the firm, and collective bargaining procedures were included in the agreement. A new wage agreement was signed, granting payment of arrears, and the ban on bonuses and allowances was lifted. All these agreements were communicated to all workers on notice boards, and naturally gave a boost of morale. Trade union membership more than doubled (Schiphorst, 266–71). Later, the chairperson of the workers' committee was put on night shift before new elections. This made communications between him and his fellow workers very difficult. Yet his popularity did not shrink and management promoted him to a junior supervisor position which barred him from elections. Within five months he was demoted again for 'gross inefficiency in performance' (*ibid.*, 273, plus footnote).

The conflicts between management and the workers' committee and the trade union soon re-emerged, and a four-hour stoppage was staged in a dispute over bonuses. The workers' committee was accused of inciting the workers, most of its members were suspended and an application was filed for their dismissal. Through intervention of the trade union the company was instructed to reinstate the workers with full benefits. Moreover, the company was later convicted for suspending two workers, members of the workers' committee, as that had been a clear case of victimisation and unfair labour practice (*ibid.*, 274). What this case study shows all along, Schiphorst concludes, is that the lofty worker participation philosophy of the company was meant to maintain the regulation of labour relations within the company, within the plant, without outside intervention, incorporating the workers' committee and the works council into the company's ideology. After all the events described above, management tried to push its own candidates for election in the workers' committee, but those newly elected members who were not union members joined the union, 'out of fear of victimisation and hoping that the union would provide shelter' (*ibid.*, 276).

#### *The Dunlop case study*

As far back as 1961, this company already had a 'joint works council'. In conformity with the workers' committee guidelines of 1981, a workers' committee was established, which met management once a month in the joint works council, now functioning in accordance with the law on works councils. The workers' committee at the time of research counted 15 representatives elected from the 12 departments of the company. The committee appeared to enjoy considerable stability, as many members held office term after term. The committee met short before the joint works council, after consultations by the section representatives, who would request their constituency to come up with grievances, and make rounds in their section to appreciate possible problems. This was not easy as workers worked in three shifts, and some factory halls were very noisy. Moreover, also in this company the 'bonus eagerness' prevailed and workers were keen not to disturb production. The committee tried to solve possible issues or listed them as council agenda points. Management considered this communication problem to be fully for the elected representatives to solve. 'If the guys elect him just because he is nice, then they have a problem,' said the works director. The committee meetings were held outside working hours due to the desire to earn the bonuses. The committee met in a seminar room on the site. The minutes of the committee meetings were typed in the company's typing pool, after submission to the personnel department. The committee had no office to keep these and other records, they had to resort to asking for the management files to verify some of their own records (Schiphorst, 2001, 286–92).

The joint works council first consisted of 10 managers and the 15 workers' committee members, who designated two senior members as spokespersons. The human resource manager was chairperson, the secretary of the committee was also council secretary. Later the composition was changed to match the legal norm that there should be an even number from both management and worker sides, now each sending seven persons, but the human resource manager retained the chair as eighth

member. The agenda of the joint works council featured the points brought by the workers' committee under 'matters arising' (*ibid.*, 293).

The first part of the council meeting was devoted to a presentation and discussion of the factory notes, in a fixed pattern and sequence: production, sales, exports, consumer and industrial products, raw materials, factory efficiency, engineering report, quality audit, waste and degrade, safety and housekeeping, personnel and welfare, suggestions scheme, sports and social, and training. These notes were prepared and distributed in advance and presented by the relevant managers. Management saw this part of the meeting an important opportunity to share information regarding the operation of the company. The objective of workers on the other hand, was to present their grievances.

Over the past five years, according to the council minutes, the following worker issues were on the agenda:

– *working conditions*: water coolers (for several years on the agenda), improvement in canteen services, running of company buses on Sundays, company buses arriving late at work causing clocking-in late, improvement of clock-in system to avoid queues at the gate;

– *money-related issues*: overtime payment, anniversary awards, addition of long-service awards at twenty years of service, buying of shares, saving loan scheme, merit bonus, provident fund;

*miscellaneous*: abolition of separate representation of weekly and monthly paid staff, buying of tyres at discount, free X-rays, free company calendars for all workers, company assistance with funerals (for instance free coffins).

Workers felt very dissatisfied by the format of the agenda which relegated their issues to fall under 'matters arising'. This meant that management would always have a month's delay before they would have to respond to these issues. Another problem was that dealing with the factory notes took a long time, and when the 'matters arising' began, not everybody was seriously interested any more: the council meetings could last up to four hours. Also, many of the worker issues were referred back to other committees or to a meeting between the relevant manager and worker representative of a particular department. Worker representatives saw this as procrastination and found that whereas issues brought up by management were implemented without delay, it took a long time to attend to worker issues (*ibid.*, 295–7).

Several managers stated in interviews they found the council meetings a waste of time, and one senior manager was of the opinion 'that the role of the workers in the joint works council was primarily a passive, listening one, and he considered worker interventions more often than not as inappropriate' (*ibid.*, 297).

As mentioned earlier, Dunlop had a company union, only organising workers of Dunlop. At the time of the research reported here, this union had started to get members from a few other rubber or related firms in the region. About half of the workers were unionised. The union was not represented as such on the workers' committee or the works council, but was involved in so-called sectoral committees dealing with wages and working conditions with the chairperson and secretary of

the workers' committee (*ibid.*, 284–5). There was a businesslike division of work between trade union affairs on the one, and worker participation on the other. The trade union dealt with collective bargaining issues, everything else was referred to the works council, and when bargaining issues came up in the works council, these were duly referred to the union or to the sectoral committee. The trade union did not put any pressure to bear on the other channels of representation as in the previous case. Schiphorst interprets this as a consequence of the in-house company union situation: the vision of the union did not reach any further than that of the similarly company-based committee and council (*ibid.*, 298–9).

The company itself had also initiated various forms of participation. The company had created a shares trust, and every worker could buy 40 shares per year at very preferential price. The stocks were held in a person's name and were given out upon departure or retirement. The company hoped share ownership would create the idea of the company as a family, but the response of workers to buy shares was not great, simply because they found it difficult to set aside such 'saving money' from their already very meagre wages (*ibid.*, 285–6). Furthermore, the company had created a number of committees on which one or two workers' committee representatives had a minority place: a suggestions committee, a production improvement scheme, a production incentive scheme steering committee, tyre division management meetings, rubber products management meetings, a job evaluation committee and a grievance and disciplinary committee (*ibid.*, 300). A lot of work for the chairperson and secretary of the workers' committee who were usually invited! But not all these frameworks actually worked on full gear. For instance, the researchers found only one suggestion box, buried under a pile of paper (*ibid.*, 301). The main scheme of company-initiated participation was the Kawasaki production system (or KPS) aiming at greater involvement of all people at all levels.

To this end, the system had three layers: the quality task forces were made up of workers and supervisors, and at subsequent higher levels managers and top managers were also involved. Under the scheme, productivity targets were set, and increases were rewarded with increases in wage and salary per section of the company. After the award the six-months base target was adjusted so that beating the target became harder and harder. The meetings to discuss productivity improvement, aiming at involving all members of the firm, was in practice dominated by management, and at the lowest layer the quality task force eventually failed to meet at all. Worker involvement in the scheme was limited to inviting the chairperson and secretary of the workers' committee to the production improvement scheme steering committee, as most managers believed no useful ideas would come forward from workers anyway. The workers' committee representatives deplored this (Schiphorst 2001, 302–4).

The conclusion regarding this case study is that labour and management had 'businesslike if not friendly relations'. The workers' committee received all assistance it needed, and the chair of the committee was compensated for the time he spent on representational work. It was top management rather than middle and line management that supported participatory relations: the latter, in particular the line managers, believed in top-down decision making. Managers 'do not believe workers' views are of much use, and some of them treat the joint works council



with utter disdain'. Between workers and managers, but also among different layers of supervisors and managers there was a conspicuous hierarchy culture, evidenced by four different canteens. The workers' input in the works council 'has hardly transcended the level of presentation of grievances and workers' wishes'; the participation forums had functioned 'only as communication facilitator' (*ibid.*, 304–5).

### *The Natprint case study*

Natprint, again, had in-house experience with worker representation channels, chaired by the personnel manager, before the guidelines of 1981. Afterwards, worker participation was structured along the guidelines and the later legislation on worker participation. At the time of research the Natprint workers' committee had 14 members, elected from the seven departments in the two different factories of the company. The committee met once a month in what was called an 'agenda meeting' to prepare the subsequent works council meeting with management. The committee meetings were held during working hours in the canteen of one of the factories. The seven members of each factory also met over lunch every fortnight to discuss specific matters concerning their factory (Schiphorst 2001, 324).

The works council meeting was held every month in the board room of Natprint. The workers' committee delegated six members to the council: the chairperson and secretary, their deputies, and two other delegates selected by the committee: '... we come together in advance to select competent and intelligent people to represent us'. The management delegation was made up of the general manager, the factory manager and his assistant, the financial manager, the sales manager and the personnel manager.

The minutes of the works councils showed a lively debate. The better part of the meetings were taken up by management to brief the worker representatives about the company's fate: '... management impresses time and again upon the workers' side to urge their fellow workers not to steal and to work harder' (Schiphorst 2001, 328).

Workers' committee members reported that they have no problem in getting their items on the agenda: 'the secretary of the general manager types the agenda and all our issues are discussed in the works council'. Then what are these issues? They themselves argued that 'normally, there are not many issues from our side'. Company loans figured highly and sometimes an individual grievance regarding the distribution of overalls was brought forward. The workers also introduced a scheme through which Natprint workers were extended credit facilities with OK Bazaars, a large department store chain (*ibid.*, 328). But workers complained about a lack of morale. The continuing announcements of losses by management made people feel uneasy, although it would appear that the worker representatives never questioned management about the validity of these financial reports. Indeed, worker representatives felt sometimes intimidated by management: 'It is difficult to say anything: my master is there ... I cannot criticise him: tomorrow he will stand against you' (*ibid.*, 328–9).

Bringing information on what goes on and is decided to the rank and file workers, and getting feedback from them, appeared to be a difficult mission. In earlier days the representatives

would gather all workers in the canteen to brief them, but under present structural adjustment conditions they feared management resistance to interrupting production and briefed workers in their own sections for five minutes if the head of department allowed it. 'Similarly, worker representatives felt inhibited by the pressure from above to freely move around the factory and talk to their work mates to assess the situation ... the workers' committee had now asked the workers to jot down their grievances and present them in writing to the committee members' (*ibid.*, 327). Other possible forms of communication were not used. The researchers observed that while the code of conduct was posted on the notice board, the minutes of the workers' committee were not, and 'indeed, were not kept'. The minutes of the works council were not well distributed, and not traceable: neither representatives of the workers' committee, nor the personnel manager received them. These same people were also not aware of the existence of the constitution of the works council, nor were they able to find a copy (*ibid.*, 327–8).

The trade union (the Zimbabwe Graphical Workers Union, affiliated to ZCTU) had been active at Natprint but got involved in a scandal with a benefit trust fund that was mismanaged and many workers lost moneys they had put in. As the union was closely connected with the administration of the fund, workers lost whatever confidence they had in the union. The union members withdrew from the fund and many de-registered as union members. Union representatives, in turn, stopped visiting the factory. Significantly also, no members of the workers' committee were trade union members (*ibid.*, 316–20). When a strike was organised by Natprint workers, the union was not invited to support. The strike itself was an interesting part of democratic participation in that it essentially was a protest against bad management: the striking workers wanted an explanation by the general manager on the losses the company was making, which affected the workers' bonuses and promotion chances. The workers, in the streets near the factory, were shouting for the dismissal of the general manager. Eventually a compromise (a reduced bonus) was found but management adamantly refused to provide explanations to the workers for the declared bad business results (*ibid.*, 330–1). The strike also demonstrated that the workers' committee did not enjoy the full support of the workforce.

For management, the workers' committee and the works council were transmission belts for company news to the workers and, in addition, management played out the representatives of the two different factories, and also tried to divide the workers along skill lines (*ibid.*, 334). And the worker representatives did not get substantive results on worker issues. In sum, there had been no real challenge to managerial prerogative at Natprint, and given the situation the trade union was in, there were no prospects in this regard for the near future (*ibid.*, 335).

## **A First Evaluation on Statutory Workplace Participation**

### *Meaningful and democratic participation*

An overall impression left by the case studies on statutory workplace participation in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania is that a number of matters dealt with in the participation schemes were meaningful for the workers, who often put these matters

on the agenda themselves. The worker representatives in the works councils received production and financial information on the company, including the annual financial statements. Worker representatives were pleased with the opportunity to be consulted on a wide range of issues of immediate concern to workers as well as management. Among the achievements mentioned were: getting salaries paid in time, incidental salary advances, provisions like milk and medicines, easing transport problems, sport facilities, loan advances, receiving reject materials, and better human relations. The workers representatives were glad that there was a forum where grievances, comments and proposals could be presented. The lists of 'worker issues' may not look impressive, but they were believed to be of importance by the workers and worker representatives, and therefore meaningful to them. Issues brought up by the worker representatives also referred to personnel matters, organisation, remuneration (bonus and allowances) and company policy.

In Zambia and in Zimbabwe participation was democratic in the sense that the representatives were freely elected from the entire workforce. In the Tanzania studies the workers' councils were mostly composed of workers who were directly or indirectly elected: the full membership of the existing trade union committee and an additional 10 to 15 per cent directly elected by their fellows in the respective company departments. The respondents in the case studies declared that the elections were often 'hot' and that the majority of workers voted. However, once in the council, the representatives were hardly accountable to their constituency as there were no procedures of recall. The accountability was thus limited to the 'next' elections. Nevertheless, generally speaking, the statutory participation forums would appear to have been democratically elected ones.

### *Lack of effectiveness*

The enormous problem in all three country was the effectiveness of worker participation. A few successes apart, mainly in the sphere of welfare decisions, workers could not mobilise much influence in decision making. In Zimbabwe, the formal structure was well-established, the legal provisions were in general respected and earlier in-house participation schemes were restructured to suit the legal provisions. The workers' committees were composed of exclusively worker-elected members, who organised themselves without outside interference, and prepared the issues and the policy to follow in the works council. The works council was designed to be a joint decision-making forum, and a fifty-fifty representation of worker and management side was adhered to. But the status of the decisions of the council was not determined in the law, and management was generally not prepared to extend the degree of worker participation further than information or consultation. The works councils did not go beyond the information outlet and grievance handling stage, functioning mainly as communication facilitators (Schiphorst 2001, 346).

As vehicles for communication the workers' committees presented workers' desires and complaints as forcefully as they could. However, with neither power resources nor sanctions at their command, the only way they could do this was with cap in hand. They had no forceful means of their own to press their case. It is distressing to note that issues

of workers' welfare stayed on the agenda of the works council for years in a row. ... At the same time management stressed the communication function of the workers' committee by invariably using the meetings of the works councils to convey company results and seemed to perceive communication was a one-way, top-down affair only (Schiphorst 2001, 338-9).

In Zambia the stated objective of the workers' councils was to review company policy, but it was mainly welfare and working conditions that were discussed. Zambia practised 'ex post facto participation'. Worker representatives in the workers' council received information on matters already decided. The councils' veto right on certain elements of personnel policy was on paper the greatest power conferred on worker representatives in any African country, but the procedural nightmares involved in repealing a management decision already made were so many that the right was never used. And this complicated matters, as not using it implied consent and put the trade union in an awkward position. In Tanzania experience could be characterised as 'dead alley participation'. Even when unanimous decisions were reached in the council, these were submitted to the board of directors for final decision in the absence of worker representatives. On minor matters council decisions were adopted, but when the decisions had important financial consequences the board could always refer to 'inability to pay'. There was no directly elected worker representative on the board to follow up the councils' deliberations or decisions. The one board member delegated by the higher echelons of the trade union federation did not make a difference, according to the case studies.

There were a number of further weaknesses and bottlenecks that hindered effective worker influence. In many cases the worker representatives had no place to meet in advance, no office where they could keep minutes and documents and therefore, there was no institutional memory. Well-informed management was better positioned to dominate the discussions and influence the decisions of the council and to 'convince' the ill-informed and less-prepared members who represented workers (Musa et al. 1997, 322). Documents were generally in the English language and thereby inaccessible to the majority of worker representatives, and the presentation of them 'rendered some of the worker representatives permanent listeners, nodding or shaking their heads to indicate approval' (Chambua 2002, 60). Apart from brief introductory seminars to brief incoming members about the rules and regulations of the council, efforts for education and training of worker representatives were conspicuously absent in the Tanzania case studies. It would appear that the provision of a presidential circular of 1973, stating that 'every parastatal is expected to set aside a special fund which will be used to meet all the expenses connected with workers' education' (quoted by Musa 1992, 31), has remained a dead letter. In Zimbabwe it was the employer who provided education and training, sometimes an apparently useful training in meeting skills (see the Dunlop case), sometimes a brainwash in a company participation 'philosophy' with ultimate public relations aims (see the Apex case). In Zambia it was either the employers who offered training to worker representatives (and even more to management representatives!) or an indoctrinating government agency. Trade union education and training was conspicuously absent.

Management resistance was mentioned as the major obstacle to effective participation. Attempts to challenge policy decisions were met with stiff resistance by management with reference to their managerial prerogatives, or simply 'outsmarting' the worker representatives by partial or difficult-to-understand information. Many worker representatives reported they could not challenge management decisions for lack of information. In Tanzania, worker representatives had a majority in the workers' council, but a minority (a maximum of one third) in the workers' council executive committee. Whatever the proportions, the general manager and the managers played a leading role in the council, keeping to the chair (only one exception), and chairing the workers' council executive committee which sets the agenda and prepares the council meetings. Chambua concludes that the fact that the general manager was the chairperson weakened the resolve of the worker representatives to challenge management (Chambua 2002, 60). The general manager, and sometimes more management representatives, were the only ones present on all participatory bodies: the executive committee, the council itself, and the board of directors, and thus held the key of power. Masters of the chair, the agenda and the minutes management had a firm hold over the functioning of the councils. Two case studies in Tanzania report that management met before council meetings to prepare themselves, in a 'management task force'. They came to meetings with prior stands whereas worker representatives did not have that opportunity. According to both management and worker representatives in Tanzania the emphasis was on management issues, and this had implicit manipulative dangers. As one study reports:

Management has made extensive use of the participation forums to enlighten the workers on the production problems and appeal to them to increase production and productivity ... [it] has effectively used the workers' council meetings to echo the financial problems and the claimed poor financial position of the company. Though the financial performance of the company is satisfactory, it is possible that management has attempted to restrain workers' demands for higher salaries and better welfare. In this endeavour, it appears that management has succeeded to get the message across. Some members are convinced the trade union committee will not solve most of their problems because of the poor financial performance of the company. Thus, one can argue that management has used the workers' council meetings to appeal for more production and discourage demands for salary and welfare improvement (Musa et al. 1997, 324).

Management in Zimbabwe was adamant, and its attitude was best illustrated by the fact that worker issues appeared in the works council agendas as 'matters arising'. The worker representatives resisted (probably aided by the fact they exclusively made up the workers' committee) being 'roped in' by management, but lacked the means and power to do so. In Zambia management exploited its professional advantage and used many methods to avoid worker influence: documents at professional level, brief summaries, and the handing in of agendas and heaps of documents at the beginning of meetings. In Tanzania management 'hijacked' participation to suit their own interests (Chambua 2002, 64–5), and in Zimbabwe workers 'remained a commodity and cost, not an asset or a human resource' (Schiphorst 2001, 344).

*The way forward*

On the whole, one cannot but conclude that statutory worker participation in the three countries is an instrument of information channelling and occasional consultation, in the interest of management at least as much as for workers, and it does not penetrate into company policy. At best, it constitutes a forum for discussion of welfare and conditions of work, at times with successful outcomes for the workers – but many of these issues also touch the terrain of trade union activity.

Despite the rather negative evaluation of the democratic, meaningful and effective performance of workers' councils, all authors of case studies in Tanzania hasten to say that a keen interest is shown by both worker representatives and workers in continuing, strengthening, and even extending worker participation to also cover the private sector, and make it legally binding. The only possible reason for this impetus must lie in the fact that participation had touched on a number of issues meaningful to the workers, matters of importance to them, matters they wanted to discuss and to be informed about. They realised that the participatory instruments available to them were largely ineffective and problematic, and made scores of proposals for the strengthening of participation, thus showing unmistakably that the taste for participation had been generated.

Schiphorst writes that, despite the lack of resources and the top-down approach by management in Zimbabwe, 'workers continued to consider the workers' committee as an important forum for presenting and pressing their needs. ... in all cases, the workers' committees became the focal point of the workers' voice on the shop floor. Sometimes inarticulate, sometimes not well trained, but always sincere and serious' (Schiphorst 2001, 339). In interviews, frustration was translated into ambition. In the case studies in all countries scores of proposals were ventured by the representatives as well as the workers on how participation could be strengthened, and these will be further elaborated on in Chapter 11.

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## Chapter 9

# Managerial Prerogatives Versus Participation Prerogatives

Much attention was paid in the APADEP studies to opinions and attitudes of worker representatives towards participation. It was argued in Chapter 3 that, whatever schemes or systems of participation are put in place by government, management or employers, these will remain relatively irrelevant unless they respond to a felt need for participation by the social structures for which they are meant. Democratic participation is more likely to achieve continuity if the workers and their representatives actually want it: that is one of the conditions for the *institutionalisation* of participation. The following evaluation criteria for social acceptance of democratic worker participation were formulated: general attitudes to participation; values attached to participation; participation militancy and propensity; participation confidence; perception of decision making prerogatives (see Chapter 3). In institutionalisation theory it is further assumed that sheer acceptance by the social structure concerned (in this case the workers) is not enough: the new idea has to be accepted and actively supported by a sufficient number of groups and organisations with power, and in the case of labour relations these may include the trade unions, employer organisations and government, plus possibly political parties.

### **Evaluation of Worker Participation by Worker Representatives**

In the questionnaires distributed during the seminars in Guinea, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mali, Ghana, Cape Verde and Burkina Faso, many questions were asked on how participation was perceived.<sup>1</sup> The results will be reported here, mainly drawing on the relevant sections in the national final book form reports.<sup>2</sup>

#### *What is understood by 'worker participation'?*

The questionnaire respondents were first invited to respond to an open-ended question about what they understood by participation, in order to get to know, as the Mali researchers called it, 'their participation dictionary' (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 73). Eighty per cent of Tanzania representatives and about 50 per cent of Guinea,

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1 The operationalisation of these research questions has been extensively described in the APADEP *Research Manual V* 1997.

2 Diallo et al. 1992, 84–99; Coulibaly et al. 2000, 71–9; Ghartey 2000a, 88–101; Chambua 2002, 148–55; Dopavogui et al. 2003, 89–92; Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 56–8; Kaboré 2006, 26–8.



Mali, Ghana and Cape Verde representatives made reference spontaneously to 'democracy', 'taking part in decisions', 'co-determine objectives', 'having things to say', 'being able to express views', 'give my point of view on a certain situation', 'getting information on the enterprise', 'freedom of expression', or just in short, 'freedom'. Other connotations (always a much lower percentage, never more than 15 per cent) ranged across the following: improving workers' conditions; co-operation between workers, trade unions and managers; better labour relations; respect for workers; contribution to productivity; better use of human resources; and only a few (less than 3 per cent) had 'sharing in profits', 'greater worker responsibility', etc., foremost in their minds when referring to participation. Said one respondent in Guinea: 'the workers are the best partner in development' (Diallo et al. 1992, 90). Abstracting from this anthology one may infer that four major distinct values were attached to participation: democracy, quality of human relations, economic equity, and productivity.

### *Values attached to worker participation*

In the questionnaire surveys the respondents were asked to check three priority opinions from a total of eight opinions so as to assess what they valued most in worker participation. For each of the four values just mentioned, two 'indicators' were chosen, as follows:

- |                            |                                                    |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Quality of human relations | 1. Better relations between workers and management |
|                            | 2. Receiving more respect as workers               |
| Democracy                  | 3. More say on important matters                   |
|                            | 4. More power for the working class                |
| Economic equity            | 5. A fairer wage/salary                            |
|                            | 6. Fairer distribution of jobs                     |
| Productivity               | 7. Working harder and better                       |
|                            | 8. Contribution to the development of the country  |

Where, in a first spontaneous reaction to the phenomenon 'participation', worker representatives primarily associate it with worker involvement in decision making, this is not confirmed when the respondents have a more 'systematic' look at the different values. When comparing four major values that may be attached to participation, the 'quality of human relations' ranks high or highest among priority values, followed by a rather uneven distribution over the remaining values: democracy, economic equity and productivity (see Table 9.1). In Tanzania and Zimbabwe, human relations scored clearly highest: this may reflect the emphasis Tanzania has placed on 'socialism with a human face' for so many decades, whereas in Zimbabwe, as the questionnaire data suggest, social relations with supervisors, managers and directors are particularly bad, as would transpire from the case studies (see Chapter 8) and from the relatively very high degree of dissatisfaction with social relations (see Chapter 5). The difference is striking between Zimbabwe, Cape Verde

and Burkina Faso on the one hand and Tanzania, Ghana, Mali and Guinea on the other with respect to ‘productivity’. In the last four countries much more emphasis is given to better use of human resources as a priority value in participation. In Mali this could be explained by the constant insistence on the concept of *responsible* participation: in view of the apparent economic underdevelopment much emphasis on the workers’ contribution is considered justified (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 73). It may be held that such a perspective was also valid for the other countries where, in the 1980 and 1990s, governments associated the concept of participation with the economic reconstruction of the country.

**Table 9.1 Most appreciated aspects of workers’ participation (Percentages; N = 6591)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Better human relations at work	na	67	72	36	83	14	2	58
More respected as worker	na	58	54	48	11	23	33	45
More say on important matters	na	52	35	53	48	13	25	35
More power to workers	na	34	10	6	36	4	-	20
Getting a fairer wage/salary	na	26	59	61	15	24	7	62
Employment for everybody	na	9	3	3	3	1	1	4
Working harder and better	na	15	40	40	53	10	30	46
Contributing to development	na	33	15	15	45	12	2	40

\* In Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mali, Ghana and Guinea (2) respondents could check three values, in Cape Verde and Burkina Faso only one.

na signifies not available

Sources: compiled by the author from APADEP survey reports: Diallo et al. 1992 for Guinea (1); Makanya et al. 1993 for Zimbabwe; Chambua 2002 for Tanzania; Coulibaly et al. 2000 for Mali; Ghartey 2000a for Ghana; Reis and Rodrigues 2003 for Cape Verde; Kaboré 2006 for Burkina Faso; Dopavogui et al. 2003 for Guinea (2).

The Cape Verde study used a different method of questioning and asked respondents to list only one, the highest, priority. The result was: 37 per cent for human relations (‘better human relations at work’ 14 per cent; ‘more respected as workers’ 23 per cent); 17 per cent for democracy (‘more say on important matters

13 per cent; 'more power to the workers' 4 per cent); 24 per cent to economic equity ('getting a fairer wage' 23 per cent; 'employment for everybody' 1 per cent); and 22 per cent for productivity ('working harder and better' 10 per cent; and 'contributing to development' 12 per cent) (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 57).

Opinions on participation thus range from more access to power and greater equity in income and employment, to more human dignity and higher productivity and economic development. The differences in the spread over the four different dimensions from country to country may be an indication that all four values (better human relations, economic equity, better use of human resources and democracy) are found of importance and that participation indeed is a political, social, economic as well as a human resource management phenomenon. It is important to note that in all countries 'human relations' and 'being respected as a worker' together get the highest priority. Thus, it would appear that the respondents see participation as an instrumental value (a means to an end) but also and very explicitly as a 'terminal' value: 'an internalised value, linking participation with self-respect and human dignity, for the workers themselves, their group or their class' (Fox 1971, 7).

*Worker participation widely (but often only conditionally) accepted*

There is almost across-the-board (between 93 and 99 per cent) general acceptance of participation by the worker representatives in all countries included in the survey (see Table 9.2). It may be (too) easily argued that a question such as 'are you in favour of participation' implies the answer, and certainly so in a questionnaire distributed during a seminar on participation. Indeed, such 'contamination effect' cannot not be denied. Yet despite the weaknesses of participation practice (see Chapters 7 and 8), and the often manipulative character under previous one-party or no-party regimes (see Chapters 1 and 2), it is perhaps surprising that almost nobody among the respondents rejects participation: it is considered too valuable to be thrown away with past regimes. But when such values as democracy and humanity are apparently attached to participation it should be accepted that the 'referendum' result on participation in general is a strong 'yes'. Several countries report that a big majority of respondents also state *they want to participate more* (in Guinea (2) 71 per cent, in Ghana 72, in Cape Verde 87 and in Zimbabwe not less than 92 per cent).

**Table 9.2 Respondents in favour of workers' participation (Percentages; N = 8551)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
Yes	96	93	99	93	99	98	92	96
No	2	3	1	3	1	-	4	3
Don't know/no answer	2	4	-	4	-	2	4	1

Sources: see Table 9.1.

However, representatives are also on their guards: in Guinea (1), for example, when practically all said they accepted participation, seven out of ten said they would *only* accept participation *if* it guaranteed protection of their interests (Diallo et al. 1992, 96), and ten years later a similar survey in the same country gave the same result: 75 per cent would accept participation only *conditionally* ('only if the conditions are created to participate effectively') (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 90). This view is almost as widely held in Mali and Ghana, and in all these three countries this may be explained as a reaction to erstwhile manipulative government-initiated participation schemes. In Tanzania, more than half of the representatives (55 per cent) were prepared to opt for participation unconditionally, yet another 42 per cent were stated to only find it acceptable on condition that the necessary conditions for success were created.

*The case studies confirm the 'thirst' for participation*

In the majority of the case studies, workers expressed positive attitudes to participation and an eagerness to participate in the company decisions ranging from welfare to strategic decisions. Case studies give concrete examples of how workers look at participation in practice. Workers in the HUICOMA case in Mali (see Chapter 7) were very eager to participate in decisions affecting the productivity of the company. They felt that they were consulted little or not at all about these decisions. They complained that management bought spare parts that were not adapted to the machines. They claimed that they should have been consulted because they would have had better ideas on how to improve productivity of the company and that they would have felt better respected in that way. In the other Mali case studies, also in Burkina, Zimbabwe and Guinea, there were often references to the awareness of workers that the company's problems and fortunes also affected the workers, in terms of durability of employment, regularity in wage payments, benefits and working conditions. Workers had the conviction that meaningful participation was good for the enterprise, for productivity and for the social climate. This very awareness was also the reason workers and trade unions wanted, in a number of cases including the South African ones, to have influence on matters like budget and marketing. Sometimes, like in the Perfinc case in Guinea and the Samatex case in Ghana, workers showed pride in belonging to the company. As reported in Chapter 7, one Perfinc worker declared: 'the enterprise is our company on our territory'. In one company the workers stated that they were ready to agree to a freeze on their salaries for a certain period on condition that they were consulted about the company issues by management, thereby showing a real commitment to the process. And in SOGETRAG in Guinea, where the public transport company collapsed because of mismanagement and corruption, the workers took their fate in their own hands. The case studies also pointed at unexpected results. The failed experience of a self-managed enterprise (EMAB in Mali) did not prevent the great majority of workers from stating that they wanted to keep a self-management structure as in such a structure they felt more respected, better consulted and better informed on the activities of the enterprise. The interviewed workers in the Ghana case studies of privatised companies resented the demise of the earlier participation structures

even when these were not functioning satisfactorily, and this resentment appeared to be felt also in the higher echelons of the workforce, among middle and senior staff, as for instance extensively reported in the GOPDC case. In Zambia the works councils, despite lack of impressive successes, were reported to have set in motion a process of conscientisation about the worker position in power relations and had widened peoples' horizons. Workers continued their interest in participation: there were many candidates for elections and there was a high proportion of voters (60 to 80 per cent). In Tanzania, the worker representatives were keen to see workers' participation extended to other private enterprises (Chambua 2002). Not a single case study reported participation *fatigue*, despite the low degree of effectiveness.

### *Participation militancy*

Attitudes are important, as they inform on the predisposition and normative orientation, or, as Chambua formulates it, they inform us of the respondent's perception of what workers' participation should be (Chambua 2002, 150). Thus, information on attitudes of worker representatives is an important 'clue' for policy making. To what degree do the respondents find they have a right to participation (*participation militancy*)? To what degree do they think they should be informed, consulted or involved in decision making with the right of vote or of veto (*participation propensity*)? To what extent do they consider themselves capable of participation in decision making (*participation confidence*)?

By far the majority of respondents in five countries for which data are available<sup>3</sup> adopt a militant attitude to participation: between 75 and 95 per cent state that workers have *the right* to be informed and consulted and have the right to vote on important decisions of an enterprise. Attitudes on profit sharing and ownership sharing appear more controversial: from high militancy in Tanzania where 80 per cent claim the right to profit sharing, 69 per cent the right to participation in ownership (Chambua 2002, 151) to much lower in Ghana (43 and 32 per cent respectively – Ghartey 2000a, 98), the rest ranging in between. The respondents appear to be most of all preoccupied with access to decision making. In the case studies it was often noted that workers and worker representatives felt frustrated about not being involved in decision making on so many matters on which they felt they could make contributions, in the interest of the enterprise as well as in their own interest (if only to keep their employment). They were aware of the advice they might have to offer, and often felt bitter about the lack of consultation. The survey results bear this out: the worker representatives see worker participation as an *entitlement*.

Participation militancy is further confirmed by the way the respondents expressed preferences for ownership. Except for Zimbabwe and Cape Verde, by far the majority of the questionnaire respondents worked in the public sector at the time of the survey in their country (see Chapter 4). In the course of the present research effort, which stretches over many years, this situation rapidly changed under the structural adjustment driven privatisation and commercialisation of most African economies. Chambua, for instance, guesses that many of the respondents who worked in the public

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3 Guinea (1) and (2), Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mali and Ghana.

sector at the time of the survey were likely to work in the private sector at the time of the publication of the results (Chambua 2002). This must have been a similar trend in the other countries. This rapid change in actual ownership structure undoubtedly interfered with one aspect of the research which tried to establish the preference of the respondents for different types of ownership. Yet it may be interesting to briefly report on these preferences as these were expressed by the worker representatives, as they may be considered indicators of what the respondents saw as the desired power structure when they filled in the questionnaire.

In Guinea, the first country where the survey was conducted, in the late 1980s, only 10 per cent preferred a private enterprise, against 20 per cent who preferred a state/public enterprise. Interestingly, the highest percentage, 39 per cent, opted for a combined trade union/government ownership, and 25 per cent a mixed private/government ownership. Interpreting these opinions the researchers suggest that these preferences are part of the residual beliefs that private enterprise should be rejected and that the trade union should be involved to protect worker interests (Diallo et al. 1992, 86–8). In Ghana, where the survey was conducted a decade later, as yet only 11 per cent wanted private ownership and only 17 per cent preferred a combination of state and private ownership. Forty four per cent wanted the trade union to be involved (4 per cent pure trade union ownership, 17 a combination of state and trade union, and 20 per cent a combination of private entrepreneurs and trade union) (Ghartey 2000a, 99).

### *Participation propensity*

The sharp edges of the feelings of ‘entitlement’ and ‘principle’, expressed in general, often lose sharpness when respondents are confronted with concrete behaviour. The questions on attitudes to participation were further detailed in the questionnaire to specific decisions as these often occur in the everyday life of a work organisation.

In order to cover the entire spectrum of decisions that are made in a work organisation, a number of ‘typical’ kinds of decisions were chosen that would allow an assessment of the position of the respondents to the main different kinds of decisions. The main categories of decisions chosen were: major business decisions, production decisions, organisation decisions, personnel decisions, terms of employment contract decisions and decisions on welfare matters. For each of these kinds of decisions three ‘indicators’ were chosen, as follows:

#### Business decisions

1. Major investments
2. Allocation of profits
3. Expansion of an enterprise

#### Production decisions

1. Maintenance of equipment and machines
2. Purchase of new equipment and machines
3. Introduction of new technology

Organisation decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Organisation/distribution of work</li> <li>2. Appointment of supervisors</li> <li>3. Working hours/breaks/shifts</li> </ol>
Personnel decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disciplinary procedures</li> <li>2. Dismissals</li> <li>3. Grading and promotion</li> </ol>
Terms of employment contract decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Transport facilities</li> <li>2. Provident funds/pension schemes</li> <li>3. Wages/salaries</li> </ol>
Welfare decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Safety and health</li> <li>2. Canteen/toilets</li> <li>3. Clean drinking water</li> </ol>

The questionnaire survey was to assess the degree of the respondents' 'propensity' to participate with respect to each of these 18 decisions: should they accept management's prerogative to decide unilaterally ('managers should decide alone'), or should they participate and, if so, to what degree: should they be informed, or consulted, have the right to vote or the right of veto?

In most of the questionnaire surveys these questions were fully covered, and are reported extensively in the respective publications. In this chapter a number of general and typical results will be presented, leaving the interested reader to examine the country publications for more detail. A first general and summary overview is presented in Table 9.3 for five countries on which the information is available. Here, the answer categories are condensed to show on what decisions the full managerial prerogative to decide is accepted by respondents, and on what decisions the respondents feel there should be any one form of participation; in other words, to identify what kind of decisions on which workers feel they have a 'participation prerogative'. In Table 9.4 a more detailed picture is presented for two countries, of which the first (Tanzania) appeared to have the highest propensity to participation overall, and the second (Guinea (1)) the lowest. The results of the other countries lie somewhere in between.

The majority of representatives want participation to cover the entire range of issues, not confined to welfare, contracts of employment and staffing matters. Their propensity for participation also focuses on organisation and production, and even more critically on key economic decisions. In Tanzania where militancy for participation is highest, more than 90 per cent of the respondents claim participation prerogatives on investment decisions and profit allocation, and in the other countries this percentage is not much lower.

**Table 9.3 Propensity for participation (Percentages; N = 6225)**

The table shows the percentage of respondents who find that:  
 M (Management): the decisions should be the exclusive prerogative of management.  
 P (Participation): the decisions should be open for participation.

	Guinea		Zimbabwe		Tanzania		Mali		Ghana	
	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P
<b>Economy</b>										
investments	35	65	20	80	5	95	20	80	27	73
profit allocation	32	68	30	70	7	93	23	77	24	76
expansion	51	49	40	60	11	89	32	68	42	58
<b>Production</b>										
maintenance	30	70	35	65	9	91	19	81	31	69
new machines	43	57	48	52	13	87	33	67	32	68
introduce new technology	43	57	29	71	9	91	26	74	40	60
<b>Organisation</b>										
work	36	64	23	76	19	81	28	72	33	67
appointment supervisors	48	52	37	63	20	80	40	60	51	49
working hours/breaks	38	62	19	81	11	89	24	76	26	74
<b>Personnel</b>										
disciplinary procedures	16	84	10	90	6	94	15	85	16	84
dismissals	35	65	16	84	10	90	28	72	24	76
grading and promotion	41	59	27	73	18	82	37	63	42	80
<b>Contract</b>										
work-home transport	n.a.	n.a.	21	79	12	88	28	72	22	78
wages/salaries	n.a.	n.a.	16	84	15	85	36	64	24	76
provident pension schemes	n.a.	n.a.	24	76	13	87	30	70	20	80
<b>Welfare</b>										
safety and health	33	67	13	87	11	89	25	75	17	83
canteen/toilets	30	70	16	84	13	87	28	72	16	84
clean drinking water	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	10	90	21	79	28	72

n.a. signifies not applicable (categories not used)

Sources: see Table 9.1.



**Table 9.4 Propensity for participation in Tanzania and Guinea**

	degree of participation	Tanzania				
		leave to management	information	consultation	voting right	veto right
<b>Business</b>						
investments		5	18	46	25	6
profit allocation		7	17	44	25	7
expansion		11	22	50	13	4
<b>Production</b>						
maintenance		9	18	50	16	6
new technology		9	17	55	14	5
purchase new machines		13	24	47	12	4
<b>Organisation</b>						
working hours		11	26	40	18	4
appointments		20	25	32	19	4
work organisation		19	27	40	11	3
<b>Personnel</b>						
grading/promotion		18	32	32	14	4
dismissal		10	25	40	18	7
discipline		6	22	44	23	5
<b>Contract</b>						
transport		12	21	43	18	7
wages		15	21	44	15	5
provident fund		13	22	47	13	6
<b>Welfare</b>						
safety and health		11	15	49	18	7
canteen/toilet		13	13	55	14	6
drinking water		10	12	53	16	9

	degree of participation	Guinea (1)				
		leave to management	information	consultation	voting right	veto right
<b>Business:</b>						
investments		35	15	39	7	4
profit allocation		32	15	39	10	4
expansion		51	13	29	5	2
<b>Production</b>						
maintenance		30	16	38	7	9
new technology		43	14	34	5	4
purchase new machines		43	12	36	5	4
<b>Organisation</b>						
working hours		38	15	34	8	5
appointments		48	11	28	10	3
work organisation		36	9	42	8	5
<b>Personnel</b>						
grading/promotion		41	11	34	9	5
dismissal		35	16	34	8	7
discipline		16	18	46	14	6
<b>Contract</b>						
transport		n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
wages		n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
provident fund		n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Welfare</b>						
safety and health		33	12	35	9	11
canteen/toilet		30	10	39	8	12
drinking water		15	15	50	11	9

n.a. signifies not applicable (categories not used)

Note: some percentages may not total 100 because of rounding up or down during calculation.

Sources: Chambua 2002 for Tanzania; Diallo et al. 1992 for Guinea (1).

Table 9.4 provides more detailed information on the degree of participation with respect to the 18 indicators of different kinds of decisions. The most common reply was a demand for consultation on these decisions (from 32 to 55 per cent in Tanzania, from 28 to 50 per cent in Guinea), followed by the wish to be informed (from 12 to 32 per cent in Tanzania, from 9 to 18 per cent in Guinea), the wish to have the right to vote (from 11 to 25 per cent in Tanzania, from 5 to 14 per cent in Guinea), or to have the right to veto (3 to 9 per cent in Tanzania, 2 to 12 per cent in Guinea).

Here, the classic contradiction between felt principle right and actual readiness for action shows. Despite the high degree of militancy reported a while ago, a much less widespread response (under 25 per cent) was ready for co-determination, let alone the right of veto. Feelings of entitlement to participation wane when people begin to realise how little control they have. The normative feeling, 'it is the workers' right', is not (yet) translated into a direct and concrete disposition to enter the decision-making arena. Here we touch the gap between what people may find 'ideal', and the reality of everyday life – what they claim 'in principle' and what they think they may obtain realistically. In Guinea, for instance, the researchers found that those who were the most militant (claiming entitlement with respect to information, consultation, voting right, profit as well as ownership sharing) scored very low on participation propensity, leading the researchers to the conclusion that these were the erstwhile sloganeers and party propagandists who typically were unable to translate their ideals into concrete action (Diallo et al. 1992, 94). Where militancy is still visible it is in that the respondents do not accept exclusive management prerogative on all levels of decision making, including the more important economic matters. They want to cover the entire spectrum, but become modest or hesitant when it comes to the degree of participation, where most content themselves with being informed or being consulted.

**Table 9.5 Respondents' views on the capacity of workers to participate in decision making (Percentages; N = 8551)**

	Guinea (1)	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Mali	Ghana	Cape Verde	Burkina Faso	Guinea (2)
... yes	62	59	59	47	89	53	45	34
... it depends	34	33	30	39	-	40	40	48
... no	4	8	11	14	11	7	14	14
no answer	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4

Sources: see Table 9.1.

*Participation confidence*

The final question, which deals with representatives' confidence in participation, looks at the extent to which they feel capable of participating. Approximately one out of two feel capable; only 4 to 14 per cent do not, and the rest say 'it depends'. Table 9.5 shows the results for six countries (as one may see, the option 'it depends' was not given in Ghana and prompted the respondents to say they are capable rather than not). The conclusion is inescapable: by and large the representatives feel capable of participating, they have confidence in their involvement in decision making, even if this only refers to information and consultation in most cases, as the research results mentioned earlier would suggest.

*Participation or bargaining?*

The structural change from a state-controlled central planning economy to a neo-liberal and privatised market economy naturally raises the question as to what method to use to defend labour interests. Negotiation and bargaining, possibly followed by confrontation, protest and strike, or co-operation, dialogue and participation? In other words, adversarial or participatory labour relations, or both? The respondents' opinions on this were asked, using the same indicators as earlier used for 'participation propensity'. For each of the 18 indicators (decisions) they were asked to choose one of the following options:

- leave it to management
- bargain from a position of independence
- participate in decision making
- bargain *and* participate.

The results are shown for the same two countries on which detailed data were shown in Table 9.4 with respect to participation propensity, namely, Tanzania and Guinea. Roughly speaking, the same kinds of decisions which were most considered to be exclusive managerial prerogatives are still found management prerogative when the option of bargaining is added (see Table 9.6). In Guinea these are company expansion, technology, innovation, appointment of supervisors: these are the decisions not contested by many. Yet over 80 per cent find that all other decisions, including machine maintenance and the efficiency of the work organisation, should not be an exclusive management prerogative. This shows the wish of worker representatives to intervene, with confrontation or participation, in these types of decisions, and confirms the results on rejection of full management prerogatives reported earlier.

**Table 9.6 Adversarial versus participatory labour relations in Tanzania and Guinea (Percentages; N = 3076)**

Types of decisions	Tanzania			
	leave to management	independent negotiation	participation	participation and negotiation
<b>Business</b>				
investments	5	16	50	28
profit allocation	4	16	47	32
expansion of enterprise	20	12	46	23
<b>Production</b>				
maintenance	21	10	48	21
new technology	8	13	51	28
purchase new machines	23	11	47	22
<b>Organisation</b>				
working hours	14	18	46	22
appointment supervisors	35	14	32	19
work organisation	19	16	41	24
<b>Personnel</b>				
grading/promotion	23	20	36	22
dismissal	8	35	34	24
discipline	6	28	43	24
personnel policy	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Contract</b>				
transport	8	18	43	31
wages	12	23	33	32
provident fund	20	20	32	28
<b>Welfare</b>				
safety and health	7	21	45	28
canteen/toilet	8	20	46	27
drinking water	8	19	48	25
sports	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Types of decisions	Guinea (1)			
	leave to management	independent negotiation	participation	participation and negotiation
<b>Business:</b>				
investments	25	11	38	25
profit allocation	13	15	43	29
expansion of enterprise	37	8	35	20
<b>Production</b>				
maintenance	18	7	55	20
new technology	32	9	39	20
purchase new machines	34	9	37	20
<b>Organisation</b>				
working hours	21	13	42	24
appointment supervisors	33	10	38	19
work organisation	13	16	47	24
<b>Personnel</b>				
grading/promotion	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
dismissal	18	26	27	28
discipline	8	16	42	34
personnel policy	21	20	35	23
<b>Contract</b>				
transport	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
wages	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
provident fund	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Welfare</b>				
safety and health	12	15	48	24
canteen/toilet	14	14	46	25
drinking water	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
sports	6	11	60	22

n.a. signifies not applicable (categories not used)

Note: some percentages may not total 100 because of rounding up or down during calculation.

Sources: see Table 9.4.

Where the managerial prerogative is rejected it is participation rather than negotiation that gets the preference of most respondents, in particular when it concerns business decisions, production, organisation and welfare decisions. For employment contract and personnel decisions (in particular when it comes to dismissal decisions), there is a much less clear preference for participation; indeed, a relatively high percentage of respondents would rather opt for independent negotiations on such matters. Interestingly, a good portion of respondents answer that they would rather see a combination of negotiation and participation. In Guinea, the researchers tried to identify the categories of respondents who were, respectively, more inclined to negotiation or participation. They found that bargaining was more popular with women and young people in the mixed and (few) private firms, whereas participation was more popular in the public sector. They venture to suggest, however, that intervening variables are at play: the respondents in the public sector had a higher level of education and had a higher seniority. The only factor that appeared to make a difference was the size of the workplace where the respondents worked: the smaller ones opted more for participation, the bigger ones more for bargaining (Diallo et al. 1992, 95).

In conclusion, the respondents opt for two ways of access to decisions in an enterprise, and do so in a differentiated way. With respect to the terms of the employment contract and related personnel management decisions (in particular on dismissals), the majority find that these matters should be approached through independent negotiation alone, or in combination with participation. For a number of other kinds of decisions (business decisions, production, organisation and welfare), the majority prefer these should be approached through participation, and another but much smaller group want this to be combined with negotiation. But there is no watertight distinction. This trend in the answers makes sense: the respondents do not want to accept participation or negotiation exclusively, but tend to embrace both alternatives: both approaches they appear to say, are of value. They opt for a differentiated and complementary worker representation policy and strategy: adversarial as well as participatory.

## **Workplace Democracy as Seen by Management**

### *Managerial prerogatives*

Managerial prerogatives have been defined as ‘rights which management asserts to be exclusively theirs and not subject to collective bargaining with trade unions, nor to joint regulation with unions or employees’ (Marsh and Evans 1973, 195). Participation prerogatives may then be defined, conversely, as rights which workers assert they have to influence decisions, either through information, consultation, co-decision or veto. Bargaining prerogatives may be defined as rights trade unions assert they have to negotiate with management on a certain range of decisions. Where the managerial prerogative is accepted by the workers the question of worker participation or of collective bargaining does not arise: the prerogatives are socially legitimate. The present study suggests that this ‘zone of acceptance’ is rather narrow

and only shared by a minority of respondents, on a limited number and type of decisions.

### *Management attitudes*

As no questionnaires were administered among managers (who did not take part in the trade union seminars), information on the attitudes of management is available mainly through the case studies. And these studies have provided a confirmation of the managerial prerogative assertion in almost all cases. The most extreme, perhaps, was in the Tarkwa mines case in Ghana where the researchers concluded the South African managers, armed with pistols and knives, had re-introduced an apartheid regime, dictatorial and disrespectful of workers, autocratic and unable to accept workers as partners in decision making. The Guinea case studies consistently report on a strictly hierarchical, 'dirigiste' management style, where, as in the SOBRAGUI case, the expatriate managers insisted on ruling as absolute masters (Chapter 7). All decisions were made unilaterally by management and employees even feared sanctions if they were to make suggestions, as these could imply criticism of management. Typically, in these case studies one only noted downwards communication through circulars, instructions and other notifications. Typical was an atmosphere of mistrust. In the Brakina case in Burkina, management adamantly claimed its right to decision making and was supported in this by the Department of Labour time and again in the reported mediation awards. In Zambia a study among managers by Mwiya, reported in Chapter 8, concludes they are inaccessible and un-cooperative, and accept workers' views only if these are complementary or supplementary to their own views, but the general impression of the Copperbelt series of case studies was that management saw participation, as one manager expressed it, as 'unwanted bother'. This was also the attitude expressed by many managers in the Zimbabwe case studies, even when, as in the Apex and the Dunlop cases, a company policy on participation was launched and cultivated (up to literally dressing up a worker director in Apex), with the aim of posing as a worker-friendly company, but not allowing any infringement on managerial prerogatives, as the case studies extensively showed. Also, in South Africa, management was active in setting up a network of joint committees with worker representatives to inform the workforce on the work organisation. The Golden Arrow Bus Company organised breakaway weekends with shop stewards to soften the 'them and us' approach (see Chapter 7). The case study reports on South Africa often conclude that it was management rather than the workers or the trade unions who were happy with these participation schemes, because it served management to brief workers and consult them. But when worker representatives wanted to put their feet on company policy or other important decisions, this was not allowed by management.

Summing up, it may be inferred that, judging by the case study results, management asserted their prerogative to manage; adamantly in most cases, 'softer' in other cases when they saw participation as an instrument (indeed a 'human resource management technique') to communicate better and solicit worker co-operation and motivation. But even where lofty concepts of 'partnership' and 'common interest' were used, managers were at best, and only in some cases, ready to share decision



making on welfare and daily management matters, but in no case were they ready to share more important decision making. And they were in a comfortable position: none of the participation schemes gave worker representatives the right of decision making. Thus the participation prerogative of workers – extending to all spheres of company decision making as shown earlier in this chapter – became stranded on a solid bank of managerial prerogative.

### **Democratic Participation and Power**

Can the participation process advance if participation prerogatives of workers are blocked by managerial prerogatives? One of the conditions for worker participation to develop and become sustainable is that relevant groups or organisations in power must be in favour of it and want to push the development of participation. If they do not, the ideas, the wishes, the claims of workers are not likely to be realised. Here, the position and attitude of trade unions must be considered of critical importance. Trade union support is needed because trade unions can act as brokers and as bridges in the participation process. A force that can be trusted by the workers can bind together different levels, different moments in time and different issues at the heart of the participatory process. As workers' organisations, trade unions are ideally placed to play this role and give democratic participation direction and shape (Kester 1996, 42–3).

From the 1960s to the 1980s, more or less in general, African trade unions were either too weak or did not enjoy enough independence from political or government structures to give shape to participation in such a way that it could serve the double aim of national development and improvement of the social, political and economic position of the workers (Kester 1992, 239). The chances for an effective trade union role can be expected to increase to the extent that the trade unions are meaningfully and effectively involved in participation policy and strategy formulation, under the condition that the trade unions remain democratically controlled by their members and enjoy autonomy when dealing with government. Over the past two decades the unions have become more and often entirely independent from government and party, but are at the same time faced with realities which weaken their impact: loss of membership and of funds, increasing multi-unionism, etc. (see Chapter 6). Workplace democracy is not a priority item on trade union agendas. Trade unions associate participation with past failed regimes, or as a threat to their own existence. In Chapter 12 and 13 this trade union hesitation with respect to workplace democracy will be further scrutinised.

Also, governments no longer champion participation. The context of labour relations has dramatically changed from a planned economy under public ownership to a neo-liberal *laissez-faire* economy under private ownership: not an ideal moment to mobilise enthusiasm for worker participation. In Chapter 1 it was recalled that the new private owners (often foreign investors and multinationals) have unfettered claims on exclusive management prerogatives after they have been lured into a particular country by governments seeking economic growth. Condemnation of previous unsuccessful regimes who had participation in their manipulative package

binds government with employers. Many governments of all political complexions seem to have embraced the neo-classical economic agenda with enterprise flexibility of employment relations and strengthening managerial prerogative (Gollan and Markey 2001, 323). Indeed, popular left-wing governments are often the most effective implementers of neo-liberal policies (Baskin 2000, 45). Governments are making pacts with multinationals and want to attract union-free (and participation-free!) free trade zones rather than nibble at management prerogatives.

Employers triumphantly point at the failure of past socialist and communist regimes to dismiss any kind of participation that smacks of power redistribution. Yet (as was clear in a number of the case studies here reported) they are actively introducing various forms of participative management. Management has discovered that participatory human resource management techniques enhance enterprise performance through a better mutual understanding between management and workers and better use of the skills and ingenuity of the workers (Gollan and Markey 2001, 333). And after the manipulative government participation policies of the 1970s ('responsible participation') manipulative 'participation philosophies' are introduced by employers, as in the Apex and Dunlop cases in Zimbabwe (see Chapter 8), seeking more co-operation, better communication, information flow, better management-worker relations, industrial peace and reduction of industrial conflict.

There is one possible harbinger of hope. The government of South Africa has opted for co-determination, instead of for deregulation or regulated markets, with *concertation*<sup>4</sup> at national level and facilitation of workplace democracy (Baskin 2000, 42). South Africa is a case on its own under unique circumstances. Yet, under the same averse globalisation circumstances, it managed to get participatory labour relations off the ground. Baskin explains how this culture of consultation between trade union and politics had already flourished in the years preceding the end of apartheid, and that the strength of the unions (in particular COSATU) and their contribution to ANC's victory have created a balance of power that could lead to national *concertation* in which the unions have far more than a ceremonial role (*ibid.*, 44–7). But, says Baskin, an 'ideological glue' is still needed to replace pragmatic considerations: many trade unionists feel highly uncomfortable making pacts with employers through compromise and gradual change (*ibid.*, 54), and this may explain why the workplace forums did not get off the ground (see Chapter 7).

But in the other African countries it would appear most governments have chosen the deregulation option, and are not harassed by trade unions with demands for power sharing. And what about the 'thirst' for participation at the grassroots? Who will listen to the workers' voice? The message and challenge to trade unions is clear: worker representatives are yearning for participation, they have a lot of faith in it and they also want their unions to do more in promoting and defending workers'

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4 As in the work of several other authors, the neologism '*concertation*' is used instead of 'consultation', as the latter concept refers to giving advice only, without any share in the taking of decisions. The concept of *concertation* (as currently used in the French literature on the subject) refers to joint policy making and possibly to joint decision taking, as in social pacts.

interests (Chambua 2002, 155). But it takes more than the workers alone to make participation a reality, and the globalisation syndrome provides no fertile ground for these aspirations if the trade unions do not pursue a participation policy as one of their priorities.

## **Conclusion**

The above data on attitudes to workplace democracy enable us to assess the second dimension of the participation process outlined in Chapter 3. The crucial dynamic proposition with respect to this dimension was formulated as follows: 'workplace democracy is more likely to develop if the workers concerned accept it as of value to themselves and consider it their right to increase worker prerogatives to participate in workplace decision making' and 'if supported by organisations with power, in particular by trade unions'. The acceptance of participation by workers is amply confirmed by the case studies, and the worker representatives in the questionnaire survey massively 'voted' in favour of participation. They appeared to attach social as well as economic values to it, and many of them were militant in claiming participation rights. Their propensity to participate in decision making on concrete issues was more modest and mostly limited to information and consultation. However, by far the majority rejected exclusive managerial prerogative, also with respect to important organisational, production and business decisions.

Support by organisations with power, however, is low or absent. Employers and management may accept workplace participation as a human resource management technique but more often, judging by the results of the case studies, are not interested in participation and rely on their legally protected full authority. Trade unions are not actively in favour of workplace participation, and governments are caught in neo-liberal capitalism, drenched under the waves of globalisation. Should this gloomy perspective be accepted? In Chapter 13 it will be argued that it should not.

## Chapter 10

# The Gender of Trade Union Democratic Participation in Ghana

Akua O. Britwum

Earlier chapters have noted the fact that the process of democratising labour relations in Africa presents formidable challenges to its trade union movements. One such challenge was identified as workers' ability to ensure that they can, directly or through their representatives, influence decisions affecting all spheres of their working lives. The nature of democratic participation and its impact discussed in Chapter 3 is linked to representative accountability and the mechanisms members can utilise to ensure that the power their elected representatives have over them is used to promote their collective interests. A crucial concern in democratic participation is therefore the manner in which collective interests are determined in order to take on board the diverse needs of all groups that make up the workforce.

Preceding chapters mention the role of trade unions in the process of democratising the workplace. Earlier discussions also explained that workers' access to trade unions is an important vehicle for guaranteeing their right to democratic participation. Though trade unions are not necessarily the only vehicle through which workers can have access to workplace democracy, their position as legitimate representatives of workers' interests underscores their role in the process. Trade union organising strategies, however, often fail to address the specific needs of interest groups within their ranks. Trade unions, according to Cook et al. (1992), do not normally provide for the expression of differing points of view because they stress the need for overall solidarity. The problem of the trade union role in defending workers' rights is the ability of representatives to articulate what the specific and real needs of all workers are. A second problem is how accurate and accessible are the channels provided to workers to articulate their interests. For workplace democracy to be effective and meaningful workers need to ensure that their representatives represent their interests and are always in a position to articulate accurately the diverse but yet legitimate needs of all members. Internal union democracy is a critical feature for the direction and effectiveness of workplace democracy that workers seek to achieve through democratic participation.

This chapter examines one aspect of trade union internal democracy: gender democracy and its implication for interest representation within workplace democracy. McBride explains gender democracy in terms of women's access and engagement in policy making and provision for women's particular concerns to be adequately voiced. Curtin, in her analysis of how trade unions in Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden have sought to make trade union structures and policy agendas more inclusive of the

interests of women workers, noted that trade unions have seldom provided adequate representation of women at decision-making levels and as such tended to be poor at representing women and their interests within democratic structures. The manner in which unions have attempted to address disparity in representation and participation have yielded varying results elsewhere (Curtin 1999; Briskin and McDermott 1993; Costello and Stone 2001; Deslippe 2000; McBride 2001).

This chapter utilises information from three APADEP research efforts in Ghana (the questionnaire survey, the case study on rural agriculture as well as the trend studies<sup>1</sup>) in an attempt to unravel the gender dynamics in trade union democracy within the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC). This chapter differs from earlier ones in several ways. In the first place it represents the experience of one country and, secondly, it does not directly address the practice of workplace democracy. Its focus is rather on the vehicles for deepening workplace democratic participation through more representative trade union structures. The single focus on Ghana is not a shortcoming, since other participating APADEP countries have basically the same neo-colonial economic systems as such a small and shrinking formal sector. Their labour market characteristics are therefore similar, with employment opportunities more readily available in the rapidly expanding informal urban sector and a low female presence in the formal employment. Trade union membership trends are, as a result, similar. An earlier summary of APADEP research results in 1997 (covering Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Tanzania and Zimbabwe for example) concluded that women were marginalised and severely under-represented in trade unions. The report blamed the situation partly on the fact that trade union organisation within formal employment sectors excludes a large proportion of African working women who are mainly located in the informal or the domestic sectors (Kester and Sidibé 1997).

Women as a social group remain relatively powerless in relation to men within trade unions (McBride 2001). The fact that the labour force in most communities has been predominantly male has helped to fuel the assumption of a worker as male and imposed a male character on the system for making demands to meet the needs of workers (Walton 1991). Unequal gender relations and their resulting impact on women's social positioning worldwide has received centre stage attention since the 1970s. Under the UN leadership and advocacy pressures from gender activists and feminist academics, institutions now devote greater attention to the manner in which their operations can be made gender-sensitive. Trade unions have also responded. As adjustment policies under the bidding of the international finance institutions shrink union membership through retrenchment, outsourcing, downsizing and casualisation, trade unions have intensified efforts to mobilise new members and in doing so directed their attention to female participation and representation.

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1 Information for this chapter is derived mainly from a combination of research efforts of APADEP in Ghana. They include survey results as captured in Britwum's chapter, 'Female Trade Union Representation and Participation in Ghana', in Agbesinyale (ed.) (2000a); also as in the case studies reported in Britwum et al. (2006); and in the chapter by Britwum, 'Trades Union Congress and Internal Democracy', in an unpublished trend study report *Trade Unions and Democratisation in Ghana*.

Trade union density is highest in occupations where men dominate, creating a union membership that is predominantly male in addition, with few women holding union democratic positions or forming part of their local negotiations. Studies have revealed how women's under-representation causes a prioritisation of workers' interests to exclude women's labour concerns in trade union struggles (Walton 1991; Grint 1991; ALRN 2004). An African Labour Research Network (ALRN) seven-country study in Africa observes that 'many men do not take women's issues and demands seriously. Meetings are often frustrating for women workers because women's needs and demands drop down to the bottom of the agenda. Men seldom take women's issues as seriously as general workers' demands' (ALRN 2004, 4).

McBride argues that institutions are not ideologically neutral to prevailing norms and attitudes in the wider society; on the contrary they reinforce and reproduce social differences and inequalities and in so doing present different benefits to women and men. In addition to the lack of neutrality within institutions, women have distinct democratic needs that derive from the patriarchal social order in which they operate. McBride quotes Bachrach and Baratz who argue that political systems develop a set of 'predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures' that operate consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others. Such values they call the 'rules of the game' and note that those who benefit from the rules are placed in a preferred position to utilise institutional structures to defend and promote their vested interests (McBride 2001). Trade unions as social institutions reproduce forms of exclusion and discrimination witnessed in the broader society. Special organisational efforts and consciousness are required to deal with women's interests in all institutions.

Due to their formal sector and male-dominated origins, trade union structures have assumed a male character and their leadership profile has taken up a masculine nature. Walton explains that the profile of an ideal union leader blends inseparably with male characteristics. The trade union core business of collective bargaining, for example, used to be characterised by hard and aggressive negotiation as a main tool for workers to extract concessions from management. Such practices have created the impression that women with feminine characteristics cannot hold union office. Women trade union office-holders are continuously confronted with a situation she describes as the 'power of conformity' where they learn to behave like dominant men or alternatively develop ways of presenting themselves and their issues in a manner which they find comfortable and acceptable to union bureaucracy and employers. Women's perception about their ability to hold the job of union activist is, as a result, severely undermined (Walton 1991).

McBride notes that a number of commentators argue that empowering women as a social group requires a practical engagement between democratic processes and the private sphere of domestic life. In the particular case of women's involvement in trade union activities, the extent to which women's domestic experiences contradict their active union participation is a constraining factor. Males however do not face similar dilemma and, as Grint (1991) observes, the conventions of trade unionism reflect male lifestyle and suit those who have no childcare or domestic responsibilities. Men's time spent on union activities is time that their female partners have created. By under-achieving at home men are freed to devote considerable time in union work.

Male time spent on union work as a result is created by women's unequal share of domestic responsibilities. Walton (1991) and Grint (1991) advocate profound changes in the ideologies that underpin women's gender roles, and a corresponding change in men's roles so that both women and men will share equally the responsibilities of domestic life. For women with heavy time burdens as a result of their disproportionate share in domestic responsibilities the returns from investments they make in terms of the time to travel and time spent at meetings are important factors that affect meeting attendance. In a situation where women's issues are not given equal attention, union meetings can be an unrewarding experience, leaving them little motivation to attend subsequent ones (Grint 1991).

The male character of trade unions is a crucial factor in women's underrepresentation and low participation in union activities because it leads to the construction of reality from men's experiences to be conceptualised as 'male standard' or 'male norms'. McBride (2001), quoting Briskin and McDermott (1993), identifies two assumptions underlying 'male standard'; firstly, that the experience of men is generic to both women and men and, secondly, that men's reality establishes a 'norm' against which women are measured. Both assumptions are used to exclude the concerns of women in trade unions and at the same time produce structures that are hostile to female involvement in trade union democratic structures. The nature of women's participation in union activities stems from their unequal social positioning. The corresponding construction of union structures and the manner in which union core businesses are conducted favour male lifestyle. This situation raises concerns about how representative unions are of the interests of all working people, particularly working women.

The examination of the gender dynamics within the GTUC will seek to address a few questions after describing the female and male participation and representation. How has the GTUC sought to address this problem and what has been the premise of its actions? How has the GTUC mobilised resources towards this end and what lessons does its efforts provide for other unions? This chapter as background examines the conditions under which women work in both the formal and informal sectors of the Ghanaian economy. In doing so it becomes possible to describe the link between trade union participation and representation on one hand and the articulation of women's concerns as working people with distinct needs generated by their gendered social positioning.

### **Women's Employment Conditions in Ghana**

The GTUC, like unions elsewhere, is a male-dominated organisation and its motto over nearly six decades of its existence ('The United Brotherhood of Workers by Hand and Brain') underscored this fact. Low female participation in GTUC affairs presents itself in both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Quantitative issues cover the proportion of working women organised and the number employed in the union bureaucracy. Qualitative issues, on the other hand, include women's effective participation and representation and the investments in women's capacity for such participation and representation. Other issues of qualitative concerns are the amount

of interest women take in affairs of their unions and the extent to which the unions represent women's interests (Graham 2001).

**Table 10.1 Employment sector of economically active population, by gender**

<b>Employment sector</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>All</b>
Public	4.3	7.5	5.9
Private formal	5.8	9.8	7.8
Semi-public or parastatal	2.0	3.7	2.9
Private informal	85.1	75.6	80.4
NGOs or international orgs	0.7	1.0	0.8
Others	2.1	2.4	2.2

*Source:* Ghana Statistical Service (2002).

The GTUC's membership constitutes about 6 per cent of the total Ghanaian labour force, which is estimated to be around 8 million. The Ghanaian labour force is predominantly located in the informal sector, where the female presence is higher. As shown in Table 10.1, the Population and Housing Census report of 2000 revealed that 85 per cent of the female labour force in Ghana was located in the informal sector. Most Ghanaian working women are either located in rural agriculture as subsistence or vegetable farmers or in the urban centres as petty traders. Only 12 per cent of women as against 21 per cent of men worked in the formal sector, from where the GTUC draws most of its members. The roots of women's low numbers in the formal sector, according to a 1998 study on women in public life in Ghana, lies in colonial employment policy. Even though Ghanaian women formed part of the labour force in the pre-colonial production activities, the colonial administration of the Gold Coast restricted women's access to formal employment by first excluding them altogether and later only allowing them into selected areas such as nursing and teaching. Those allowed into the formal sector were considered incapable of fulfilling the duties of senior officers (ISSER/DPPC 1998). Women who were admitted were paid less than their male counterparts and the conditions of work obliged them to make a choice between family life and their career. Colonial employment regulations prohibited married women, pregnant women or women with children from holding certain formal sector jobs.

Post-independence legislation removed legal barriers to women's formal sector employment but, to date, unequal access to education and subject choice gender stereotyping in educational institutions still conspire to keep women numbers in formal sector employment very low (Brown et al. 1996). Low levels of female presence in the formal sector is further compounded by levels of vertical occupational gender segregation that limit female participation to a few sectors such as those of service and trading. The APADEP survey results confirmed this by revealing that female respondents who were formal sector workers were concentrated in the service



sector and were more likely to work as unskilled or low middle white professionals (Box 10.1).

### **Box 10.1 Labour force segmentation by gender**

Respondents on the whole tended to be concentrated in the service sector (60 per cent); female participation was higher than males – 67 per cent as against 58 per cent in this sector. Women were concentrated in professions of a certain type, mainly low white-collar. Little over one quarter were in middle white-collar jobs. There were more male respondents who held professional positions than women. Neither educational background nor length of service appears to provide adequate explanation as to the nature of jobs that males or females hold. What is of interest here is that trade union participation has been noted to be influenced greatly by the type of jobs that individuals hold. Women's educational background and low positions into which low educational background leads them have been blamed time and again for their low levels of union activism (Walton 1991). In this instance, though, it appears that the nature of education women received could be the factor because, as far as educational level attained is concerned, females appeared to have left formal school at levels higher than males.

*Source:* Britwum, in Agbesinyale (ed.) 2000a.

Job segregation by gender, according to Briskin and McDermott, is critical to an expanded understanding of the relationship between women and unions and therefore union gender democracy:

Institutionalised job segregation is fundamental to patriarchy because it ensures that women's place in the labour market is subordinate to men's and so reinforces the unequal division of labour within the household. Job segregation constructs women's primary commitment as devotion to home and family, whether or not they work for pay. Defined as wives and mothers first, women are expected to take family life as their general responsibility around which all other commitments must be organised (Briskin and Dermott 1993, 331).

One other gender dimension of labour force participation in Ghana is the gender wage gap. The report by the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS-4) identified differentials in female and male earnings, with females earning an average of 785 cedis as against male earnings of 1,070 cedis<sup>2</sup> per hour in main jobs by industry in which they were located. The ALRN report on the gender impact of labour market liberalisation in Ghana explained how this gender wage gap has increased during the 1990s. Women 'in 1992 for example earned 94 per cent of the average male wage across all occupational groups. By 1999, they were earning 62 per cent of the average male wage' (ALRN 2004, 50). The APADEP questionnaire survey confirmed

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<sup>2</sup> At 3,000 cedis to US\$1 in 1999 (date of the survey), these earnings were equivalent to \$0.26 and \$0.36 respectively.

this wage differential, whilst almost 40 per cent of female respondents earned what was classified by the study as ‘low’, only 20 per cent of males earned that income; again 60 per cent of female respondents and 70 per cent of male respondents earned income classified as ‘average’ by the study. Respondents’ educational background in this instance offered no explanation (Box 10.2).

### **Box 10.2 The gender wage gap**

Male salary levels were slightly better than for females. The educational background and professional types do not offer adequate explanation for the differences in salary levels, however slight. A possible explanation could be found in occupational gender segregation, where females were likely to be concentrated at lower levels of similar occupations or in professions that attracted lower remuneration.

*Source:* Britwum, in Agbesinyale (ed.) 2000a.

The ALRN report explains that the gender wage differential cannot be simply accounted for by the fact that women tend to be employed in less well-paid jobs. For the author of this report, the ‘increase in the differential could be explained by the reality of downgrading of women’s conditions of employment and the increased shift into the informal economy’ (ALRN 2004, 50). Examining econometric analysis of gender wage gaps in Africa that justifies the female lower earnings on the basis of gender productivity gap, he suggests the need for such methodologies to take on board the influence of gender social relations that affect productivity-determining factors such as training and selectivity bias.

Gender discrimination is not only limited to wage earnings but also played out in the interpretation and final allocation of work benefits. A report of the Gender Desk of the GTUC notes that:

concluded collective bargaining agreements are supposed to offer equal protection and benefits to all members. But the de facto situation bears evidence to the contrary within some of the unions. Women are denied medical facilities for their wards and spouses, bereavement benefits in the loss of spouse and benefits under scholarship schemes designed for employees’ children and wards (GTUC 1997, 12).

The questionnaire survey examined the levels of satisfaction that respondents received from their employment situation in the areas outlined below:

- social relations with fellow workers
- social relations with management
- work done
- present job
- work distribution
- toilet/washroom

- disciplinary procedures
- health and safety
- equipment maintenance
- office equipment and machines
- monthly salary.

The conclusion was that not only did women face discrimination in the distribution of work benefits, they also received lower levels of satisfaction from employment conditions. The proportion of female respondents who reported being satisfied for all situations outlined above were lower, except in the area of health and safety (see Box 10.3).

### **Box 10.3 The gender satisfaction gap**

Female respondents appeared to be satisfied with the social relations in the place of work more than with all other spheres of their working life. The jobs they held, as well as the specific task performed at work, do give about two thirds of the female respondents satisfaction. The proportion who were satisfied decreased when issues like health and safety, equipment use and the way they are maintained were considered. Fifty eight per cent of female respondents were unhappy about the education and training they received on the job. The area where dissatisfaction was highest was with the salaries respondents received. The proportion of females who reported being satisfied tended to be smaller than that of males in several areas, except toilet/washroom facilities and health and safety conditions in the place of work.

*Source:* Britwum 2000a, in Agbesinyale (ed.) 2000a.

The situation of women within the formal sector workplace presents problems. In addition to low status and their general lower satisfaction with working conditions, the ISSER/DPPC study drew attention to masculine work environment, subtle (and in some case blatant) discriminatory practices in tasks assignments and promotions, and general access to work benefits. The study also noted that both formal and informal networks which facilitated male career advancement excluded women. Women's ability to use networks, lobby or even compete with men was hampered by accusations of sexual impropriety and incidents of sexual harassment (ISSER/DPPC 1998).

The ALRN seven-country report of 2004 explains that, whatever the shortcomings of women's participation in the formal sector workplace, its public sector has over the years in many countries played the role of a model employer in respect to women by:

- providing secure employment for women
- setting an example in terms of affirmative action policies and helping to create a culture of gender equality in the workplace

- eliminating barriers to women's employment
- providing effective education, training and skills development and
- creating working conditions and benefits that enhance gender equality.

Women's formal sector employment experiences differ from men's in remarkable ways, with male situations generally being better. If workplaces are structured to benefit men then this situation raises important questions about the legitimacy of male-led trade unions to act as true representatives of women's interests. We turn now to examine the conditions of working within the informal sector.

Case study reports (Britwum et al. 2006) conclude that that the informal sector offers less favourable employment conditions for all its operators. The situation of working women in the informal sector varied from that of their male counterparts. Here, as in the formal sector, occupational sex segregation affected income and employment status. Male tasks, on the whole, were better rewarded and attracted a better status and income than the female ones. Female informal sector employees were restricted to areas where labour relations were autocratic and difficult to negotiate. Men dominated employment types that gave security and better conditions of service. They were more likely to be enterprise owners and to be located in informal waged employment. The study also noted that women in rural agriculture generally lacked access to production assets like land and credit and tended to be more vulnerable and more highly prone to the risk of destitution compared with their male counterparts (*ibid.*).

The case study of informal sector agriculture showed that, as subsistence farmers, most women worked on land owned by their husbands. Labour relations were well integrated into the social structure of the communities where the enterprises were based and as a result enterprise owners did not appear exploitative. Social considerations like family and kinship ties dominated rural informal sector relations. This presented difficulties for the observance of worker rights. The impact of social relations on the work environment in the rural informal sector blurred exploitative practices within working relations. The presence of kin relations between husband and wife overshadowed labour relations and eroded the wife's rights as a worker. Within informal sector enterprises, especially those that employed family labour, the principal motive was family welfare and women and children's unpaid labour was taken for granted (Britwum et al. 2006).

Labour relations in terms of production relations between husband and wife were governed by traditional marital laws; the distribution of income and other benefits that accrue from that labour appeared to be escaping those norms. The traditional norms that compel women and children to offer free labour in enterprises owned by the male family head were stronger than those that governed the distribution of the resources from family enterprises. Wives were no longer entitled to their traditional share of income received from family production. The opportunity to negotiate the fruits of their labour was dependent on their good behaviour and not the amount of labour invested in the family enterprise. The measurement of good behaviour was the prerogative of husbands. Public shaming, a powerful sanctioning mechanism used to regulate informal sector labour relations within rural agricultural communities, ensured that wives and children made their labour available to husbands. The

intensity of the shaming that should compel compliance by husbands to fulfil any obligations to adequately compensate their wives' labour into family enterprises was not as powerful.

Despite the Statutory Interstate Succession Law PNDC 111, traditional inheritance systems, which favour males to the neglect of females, were found to operate in many of the rural communities where the case study research was conducted. Both traditional systems of inheritance that operate in Ghana, patrilineal and matrilineal, transfer family property and office to males. The idea that males inherit family property means that parents expect to be cared for in their old age by their male children. Even though several experiences show how inaccurate this assumption is, male children get higher investments in their upbringing than their sisters (see Box 10.4).

#### **Box 10.4 The gender inheritance gap**

By and large, the traditional social security system, which somehow and by extension dovetails into the traditional inheritance system, discriminates against women. In the first place women do not inherit land, hence ageing fathers prefer to prepare their male children to inherit from them, no matter how young they may be. Parents tend to invest more in male children than in their female counterparts because they see male children as more reliable sources of social security, disposed to providing more and better care for them during their old age than female children could do.

*Source:* Britwum et al. 2006.

Young (1993) disagrees with the notion that households operate as income and labour pooling units to the equal benefit of all members. Ghanaian households do not form corporate units and women and men traditionally have separate sources of income and financial responsibilities. Income accruing from the household enterprise, therefore, is not shared on the basis of labour invested but who owns it. Bryceson uses the concept 'circumscribed autonomy' to explain women's submission to offer unpaid labour in a system where direct benefits are not clear-cut (Bryceson 1995). Circumscribed autonomy, she explains, is the outcome of unequal power relations and gender ideologies that construct women as subordinate and not fully autonomous agents. The situation, she further elaborates, is a manifestation of the interconnectedness of the interests of women and other household members, and the willingness on the part of women to engage in a relationship that entails a loss of autonomy because of the way they interpret their motherhood responsibilities (*ibid.*). Whatever the interpretation, women in informal agricultural production supply unpaid labour and have very little support to ensure that their interests as workers and family members are protected. The conditions under which informal sector workers operate plays up sharply how the gendered social positioning of women is used as a basis to exploit their free labour.

The idea that all household members benefit equally from the household income that accrues from the enterprise their labour supports was found to be false in the rural agricultural families in Ghana. The fact that labour obligations were derived out of marriage produced some difficulties for women and also men who were therefore unable to separate labour from marital rights. Marital considerations also made it difficult for family labour relations, especially between spouses, to be subjected to change. The main losers were women and their children, especially daughters (Britwum et al. 2006). The question of what rights family member employees should be entitled to in such enterprises and how such rights can be protected did not present easy answers. The situation was further complicated by gender power relations and the ideological perceptions about what a good wife and mother should be.

The female employment situation presented dynamics that were the direct result of their gendered social positioning. Two situations, however, operated to sideline their interests from mainstream trade union concerns, the first being their unusual concentration in sectors where traditional trade union structures are difficult to operate and, secondly, their low representation in trade union decision-making organs. The situation of Ghanaian women workers underscores the observation by Cook et al. that women's employment is far from granting gender equality because the nature of women's jobs may be more telling than the number of women employed, and the quality of the jobs more important than the total number in employment. For them, women's employment will translate into equality only when women have a preparation for work and choice of occupations equal to men's, and when they have equal opportunities for and equal treatment at work (Cook et al. 1992, 6). We shall examine qualitative issues related to female trade union participation in the section that follows. How does the peculiar nature of women's labour force participation impact their trade union membership and representation in Ghana?

### **Female Trade Union Participation**

One aspect of trade union internal democracy is the extent to which differing interest groups' representation in decision-making structures is proportional to their membership numbers. Experiences from several unions have shown that nowhere is the representation of women in union leadership proportional to their numbers in the membership (Walton 1991; Grint 1991; Redclift and Sinclair 1991; ALRN 2004). The usual recommendation is for a critical mass of 33 per cent of female representation to ensure that structures within organisations respond to the peculiar needs of women. Female membership within the GTUC is 25 per cent, well below the critical mass, and their participation in decision making is lower than their membership strength of 25 per cent. The trend study explained that – see Box 10.5.

The other aspect of female participation in decision making is the nature of positions that they hold. In the main, office-holders within the GTUC held positions of appointment, as regional or departmental heads. The questionnaire survey revealed that elected female union executives were representatives of women's wings or occupiers of special seats created in the union structures or that they held office as trustees; a position that responds to stereotypic notions of women being less likely to

embezzle trade union funds. The position of organiser has created an outlet through which female participation on decision-making bodies of the GTUC has expanded. Women in trade union leadership positions hardly ever hold positions that allow them decision-making powers, by virtue of their positions as ex officio members who cannot exercise any voting powers (see Table 10.2).

### Box 10.5 The gender representation gap

A report of the Policy and Research Department of the GTUC in March 2003 reveals that female representation on all decision-making bodies is 16 per cent. Female proportion of trade union executives fall as trade union levels of decision making rise; thus the proportion of female-held positions fell from 68 per cent at the local to 23 per cent at the national level. One interesting deviation, though, was district-level representation. Females constituted 17 per cent of the executives at district level, a proportion lower than the national level. In 2003 only one female held a position on the Executive Committee (see Table 10.2).

*Source:* Britwum (unpublished).

**Table 10.2 Membership of executive bodies/heads of departments of GTUC, by gender**

Decision-making body	Female		Male		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Executive Board	1	2.5	39	97.5	40
Executive Board (plus ex officio members)	17	20.7	65	79.3	82
Steering Committee	1	4.3	22	95.7	23
Steering Committee (plus ex officio members)	3	8.1	34	91.9	37
Executive Committee	1	16.7	5	83.3	6
Heads of Department	1	12.5	7	87.5	8
Finance Board	1	11.1	8	88.9	9
Total	25	12.2	180	87.8	205

*Source:* Policy and Research Department of GTUC (2003).

Graham's conclusion (that, within the GTUC's leadership the male stranglehold on elected posts in the executive board was unchanged by elections in 2000) still holds good today (Graham 2001). Elected positions are very important for granting office-

holders the right to vote on decision-making bodies; few women on these governing structures have been elected by Congress, the highest decision-making body of the GTUC that meets every four years. A related issue was the manner in which women and men union leaders conducted their leadership responsibilities. Women trade union leaders spent fewer hours on trade union activities and were more likely to perform union duties during working hours. There was also a qualitative difference in the manner they operated as union office-holders; for example, the positions they held restricted the range of union tasks they performed to organising union meetings and running educational programmes. Males mainly presided over union meetings or represented all workers at management meetings. Female leadership had increased significantly in the GTUC over the years; however, female and male leaders differed markedly in terms of the manner in which they conducted their leadership responsibilities and the leverage they exercised over decision making in union governing organs.

Respondents to the questionnaire survey attributed the low levels of female participation in trade union decision making to attitudes and perceptions about women and their supposed abilities. First, respondents felt that the patriarchal norms of the Ghanaian society were hostile to women office-holders. The male-dominated social and cultural environment, which promoted the idea that certain positions were the preserve of men, dampened women's willingness to represent their fellow workers on trade union bodies. Respondents also blamed stereotypical notions about women, such as women's lack of self-confidence and capacity to summon an independent opinion on public issues, their aversion for public events, and their apathy to trade union issues. Such notions and attitudes created a situation where both female and male union members had difficulty electing women into union positions which they perceived to be male.

The respondents of the questionnaire survey also blamed sexual division of labour that assigns women total care of the household as an important constraining factor on women's availability for union activities outside work hours. Questionnaire survey results showed that respondents operated similar patterns of sexual divisions of labour responsible for keeping women out of trade union activities (Britwum 2000a). As Box 10.6 shows, more females were responsible for food preparation, dishwashing, laundry and childcare whilst more respondents reported being jointly responsible for childcare with their partners. The questionnaire survey also revealed that domestic roles affect women trade union office-holders. The presence of wives in men's lives is central to men's successful performance of their careers as union leaders (Cook et al. 1992). Cook et al. explain that many a union career has been built on the support of home comfort and stability created by a wife. Women have a harder time than men in union careers because they have no wives.

Also cited as a possible reason for low female participation in trade union activities was the female obligation to provide financial support for the household; this pushes working women to earn extra income outside work to supplement their meagre salaries. Table 10.3 shows that 57 per cent of respondents in the questionnaire survey were jointly responsible for providing money for household upkeep.



**Box 10.6 Sexual division of labour within households**

Division of labour within respondents' households though still reflects in the main traditional sexual divisions of labour (see Table 10.3).

Females were mainly responsible for food preparation (79 per cent of cases) and dishwashing. There were, however, no instances where males were solely responsible for the performance of a particular role. The traditional role of household income provider was now a shared responsibility in respondents' homes. Other instances of household role sharing covered childcare and, to a lesser extent, shopping and laundry work; males did take a more active participation in performing these roles.

Source: Britwum 2000a.

**Table 10.3 Role responsibilities in respondents' homes, by gender**

Household task	Person responsible			
	N/A	Female only %	Male only %	Both %
Money for household upkeep		5.5	37.7	56.8
Food preparation		78.9	2.5	18.6
Childcare		27.1	3.4	69.4
Dishwashing		76.8	3.4	19.8
Shopping		56.8	4.1	39.0
Laundry		59.5	2.8	37.4
Craft work	69.1	5.5	12.0	13.4
Farm work	34.1	1.6	11.4	52.5
Cattle rearing	78.2	0.4	17.3	4.1

Source: APADEP Survey Data 1994–98.

Women's access to and engagement with union decision making is low. This situation raises questions about how representative existing trade union structures are and how this in turn affects democratic participation in the workplace and beyond. The factors identified in the Ghana APADEP questionnaire survey as being responsible for low female participation in trade unions closely corroborate those discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Occupational sex segregation, the male character of GTUC and membership perceptions about the qualities of a union leader, lack of female access to trade union education and female gender roles were the main causes of low female representation and participation in union decision making in the GTUC. The questionnaire survey noted that once females gained entry

to trade union decision-making structures, the way they perceived their union and work conditions did not differ markedly from that of their male counterparts. The main problem was therefore female access into trade union decision-making organs. How the GTUC has engaged this problem over the years is the subject of discussion in the section below.

### **Tackling Gender Issues within GTUC**

Our discussions earlier have shown that female qualitative involvement in GTUC is weak. This fact is not lost on the GTUC, which acknowledges that low female representation is a problem that undermines its character as a democratic organisation and asserts that it remains committed to improving the participation and representation of its female membership.<sup>3</sup> For Costello and Stone (2001), the recognition of the importance of gender integration within union structures in the form of a policy is an important first step towards making union structures gender-democratic. The GTUC has gone beyond this first important step. Its efforts to tackle women's low participation and representation has involved both institutional and organisational measures that take into account the peculiar character of the GTUC as a mass organisation and a bureaucratic institution. These policy strategies are captured in the GTUC general policy documents adapted for adoption every four years at its Quadrennial Delegates' Congress. The justification for its gender policy states that the GTUC 'and its affiliates have recognised the relevance of responding to a changing situation and conditions that undermine its character as a democratic organisation' (GTUC 1996, 31). The strategies outlined include affirmative action provisions, like quotas to help to reduce disparity in representation, the creation of special seats within union decision-making structures for women, promotional measures such as capacity building and skills training for individual women leaders, as well as group representation. Thus, over the years, the gender policies of the GTUC have sought to address gender issues by targeting these areas:

- increasing women's representation on union decision-making structures
- increasing women's participation in trade union activities
- tackling workplace gender discrimination and women's labour conditions
- dealing with women's social rights beyond the workplace
- skills and capacity development for negotiating and career advancement
- increasing gender sensitivity within the GTUC.

The specific focus of various gender policies, however, have varied over the years. The present gender policy adopted in 2004 at the 7th Quadrennial Delegates' Congress aims to increase women's representation in all trade union structures and activities through affirmative action programmes. In addition the policy aims to enhance the negotiation skills and capacity of women and men through development

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<sup>3</sup> Policy of the Ghana Trades Union Congress adopted at the 5th Quadrennial Congress 1996 (GTUC 1996, 31).

programmes and promote solidarity among women and men in advancing the concerns of women.<sup>4</sup> Earlier policy objectives were limited to women only. The 2004 provisions seek to include also men in addressing gender issues within the GTUC. Though the mention of men indicates a desire to move away from targeting women, it is not clear how male privilege in accessing capacity development projects in mainstream trade union structures will not be promoted here. The 2000 policy was directed at increasing women's participation in trade union activities and trade union decision making, making changes to gender-discriminatory work culture as well as strengthening women's rights within the wider society. In addition the 2000 policy sought to create increased gender awareness and sensitivity within the GTUC, instituting the necessary organisational changes to facilitate its implementation. The main objectives of the 1996 policy were to promote the integration of gender in collective bargaining agreements, create gender awareness within the movement and strengthen women's workplace rights.

Set up in 1969 with support from the African-American Labour Centre (AALC), the Women's Desk (then the Women's Section) is the unit within the GTUC charged with the responsibility of implementing the gender policy. The Women's Desk is presently located in the Organisation Department, having travelled through the Administration, Industrial Relations, Economic and Research Departments as a Women's Section. Its main focus after restructuring was more specifically to address women workers' problems, increase their trade union participation by mobilising 'women members of the national unions to promote their welfare, seek assistance for the national unions and their structures, together with the TUC, in resolving some of their problems as working women and to ensure their effective participation in the Trade Unions' (GTUC 1997, 4).

The change from a Section to a Desk was the result of the recommendations of a Steering Committee report to the Executive Board. By 1988 doubts were expressed about the effectiveness of the Women's Section and efforts were made to rectify the situation. The trend study report captured in Box 10.7 stated that the first phase of GTUC's women's organisation was described as unstructured and without focus.

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4 Medium-Term Policies of the Ghana Trades Union Congress, 'Meeting the Challenges of the Quadrennial 2004–2008'; adopted at the 7th Quadrennial Congress, 2004, 42.

**Box 10.7 The battle to bridge the gender representation gap (1)**

The Activity Report of 1988–92 mentions that the poor performance of the Women’s Section was made known to the Executive Board (EB). At its meeting of 20 October 1988, the EB tasked the Steering Committee with examining the operations of the Women’s Section and making recommendations on how to make it effective. The task fell on an all-male committee of four who made the following recommendations:

- the Women’s Section should be turned into a Women’s Desk and a deputy head of section appointed as its head
- four women organisers should be appointed to take charge of women’s activities in the ten regions.

The Congress of 1992 amended the constitution of the GTUC to allow for three elected women observers on the EB. These three women were drawn from the three zones into which the Women’s Desk and the Education Department had divided the country. They have been members of the EB since the third quarter of 1993. Five females were co-opted into the executive of the Accra and Tema District Councils of Labour at the instance of the Women’s Desk and the head of the Organisation Department. The conclusion drawn was that ‘it is not only commended that other District Councils of Labour do the same but special seats should be created for female representation at all levels of decision making within the trade union hierarchy, at least as an interim measure until they receive adequate exposure and acquire the necessary skills that will enhance their viewing with men during elections’ (GTUC 1992, 24).

In January 2000, of the four women’s organisers, three have been appointed to the position of regional secretary. There are plans to implement constitutional provisions that demand that each region be assigned a separate woman’s representative and co-ordinator. This will bring the female representatives on the EB to 21.

*Source:* Britwum (unpublished).

The main activities carried out by the Women’s Desk in order to execute its mandate include excursions, general meetings and workshops, as well as conferences and seminars designed to sensitise women and address women’s rights as workers, together with family planning issues. Other activities undertaken by the Women’s Desk were fundraising for charity and to generate income, family and reproductive issues, and the development of educational materials, as well as entrepreneurial skills training. The Women’s Desk has used educational seminars and meetings to increase women’s knowledge and interest in trade union issues. Trade union education has occurred side by side with lectures and discussions on topics ranging across global and national political and economic concerns, as well as topics on women’s gender roles such as childcare, family planning and avenues for credit to earn additional income. The idea of attaching such topics to trade union education was to increase the practical utility of union education sessions for women. This approach, according to the GTUC’s activity report, was so successful in attracting

members to union meetings that the Executive Board recommended its application at District Council of Labour meetings. Whereas this strategy has been successful in increasing attendance at meetings and female participation in the activities of the Women's Wing, especially at the district level, an examination of the activity reports of the Women's Desk over the past 12 years indicates that educational activities on women's traditional gender roles are beginning to become an end in themselves and no longer a means to attract participation.

At the organisational level the main GTUC strategies have been to separate organisation in the form of women's wings, affirmative action provisions to achieve gender parity in representation, and participation and educational programmes to enhance capacity and create sensitivity to gender issues amongst union representatives. By 1998 regional women's wings had been set up in all ten regions of Ghana and a year's project to integrate women into trade union activities launched. The period also saw the adoption of a trade union policy on sexual harassment. Graham notes that, as per 2000, 11 out of the 17 affiliated national unions had set up women's wings or committees. Eight had appointed women's co-ordinators. The General Agricultural Workers' Union as early as 1987 had constitutionally institutionalised women's self-organised structures and appointed a women's co-ordinator (Graham 2001). To date, all affiliated national unions have gender policies and women's wings with the sole objective of improving women's representation in trade unions. National unions have also undertaken constitutional amendments to secure the institutional changes needed to implement their gender policies. The women's self-organising body, the women's wing, now operates from the branch at the enterprise level through the district to the regional and the national level. Constitutional provisions allow the branch, district and regional women's wings to operate as integral parts of mainstream GTUC consultative structures; that is, the District and Regional Councils of Labour. The provisions do not extend to the national level, however, and the National Women's Wing does not enjoy a similar position in relation to the Executive Board.

McBride, whilst examining gender democracy in UNISON, argued that union structures need to be organised around principles of individual and group representation, through the reservation of seats in proportion to the numbers of women within the union and support for self-organisation from women's rights of representation to mainstream committees (McBride 2001). Curtin explains that women's divisions have been an acceptable means of incorporating and addressing the 'woman question' without undermining the overriding cause of labour unity (Curtin 1999). GTUC appears to be utilising the strategy of women's self-organisation. Strategically it is creating an all-women's structure, assigning quotas for women's representation on its ad hoc boards and committees and increasing the number of female elected officers. This approach, however, generates its own problems. The debate within feminist circles is how adequately women's organisations can meet the problems the women bring to union life as a result of their gendered social positions. In the first place, the legitimacy and relevance of such separate spaces are often contested and, secondly, the existence of separate spaces tends to create complacency and justifies the removal of women's concerns from mainstream trade union activities. The question of how to integrate women's separate union organs into mainstream trade union structures still remains.

Quotas and reserved seats have been an organisational tool utilised effectively to draw more females into leadership positions in trade union structures. Reserving seats for women is a necessary condition for guaranteeing the representation by women in parity with men; if the seat taken by the individual member of the marginalised social group would otherwise have been taken by an individual from an over-represented privileged group, then this reallocation of seats provides a form of what McBride describes as basic justice (McBride 2001). This strategy has been utilised to a large extent by the GTUC, with a lot of successful outcomes. Several women union leaders have accessed office through affirmative action provisions. Over a period of eight years the GTUC increased female representation on decision-making bodies by 186 per cent (about 6 per cent in 1996 to 16 per cent in 2004). McBride cautions that providing women with seats on decision-making bodies within trade unions is not enough to ensure that their interest as a social group will be adequately represented. For her, the word 'representative' infers at least two duties, amongst others: to represent the interests and views of the represented, and to share some of the characteristics of the represented (McBride 2001). Citing Cockburn (1996) as well as Cunnison and Stageman, she explains that:

... the election of individual members of oppressed social groups does not guarantee that they will pursue the concerns of the oppressed social group. Since one of the duties of the representative is to represent the interests and views of the represented, if a woman for example is elected from a mixed-sex constituency, then she has no obligation to pursue the concerns of women. Strategies that only seek to increase the number of women in representative positions still leave the pervasive hold of male culture, the underpinning of formal and informal male power (McBride 2001, 21).

Graham (2001) also agrees with McBride that there is no guarantee that once women are elected into union decision making they will bring a gender perspective to bear on union decisions. Curtin also makes similar observations for the four countries (Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden) she studied. Women unionists in these four countries acknowledge that the presence of women in the upper echelons of trade unions does not guarantee the representation of all interests important to all women workers (Curtin 1999, 148). There are several reasons for this situation. Women's presence in leadership positions has basically been to serve two functions, one as an end in itself, to ensure that leadership positions are proportionally distributed amongst all groups that make up the trade union membership (basic justice) and, secondly, to ensure that women's peculiar needs and interests are given voice in union decision and policy making and representative democracy. In most instances the two functions are confused and usually there is the attempt to bunch these two functions in one when creating special seats or granting quotas for women in union positions.

When women are elected to represent all women on trade union structures the implicit assumption is that women are a homogenous group with the same experience of subordination. This fact makes little room for differences and other social factors beyond gender that can unify them. Even more problematic is the notion the women are the best representatives of women. Curtin, quoting Riley, cautions that we should not reduce everything related to women to their 'women-ness', but accept

that women can be very differently positioned, thus making the continuity of women as one subject unreliable. Other factors give women affinity besides the fact of their being women, and all institutions working towards greater gender democracy need to recognise the fact that women are differently located, and that other factors besides their being female can unify them. On the other hand, Curtin acknowledges the fact that representation on trade union structures for women is about the formulation of identities and interests as well as how they are represented. Finally, because women's interests are varied, fluid and still in the process of formation, it is difficult to separate out what is to be represented from who is to do the representation (Curtin 1999). So long as women's issues and problems are still in the process of articulation, the case for more women as representatives on union organs to help define areas of concern to women and construct appropriate gender sensitive policies will still remain. Choosing women to represent women's interests in union structures should be done in full acceptance of the fact that there are differences amongst women just as there are amongst men and amongst the general union membership.

By the GTUC's own account, the impact of its strategies to address women's low participation and representation has been mixed. It has made remarkable achievements, especially in the areas of growing consciousness amongst women, and this is exhibited in the readiness of more women to contest trade union office. The area of affirmative action has also led to some improvements in women's representation on decision-making bodies in less than ten years by 186 per cent. This increase still falls below its membership proportion of 25 per cent and the GTUC's targeted 30 per cent.

Both the questionnaire survey and trend study reports questioned the ability of the Women's Desk to implement the contents of the GTUC's gender policy or to further transform gender discriminatory practices within the GTUC and its affiliates through such activities. The observations of the two studies are captured in Box 10.8.

### **Box 10.8 The battle to bridge the gender representation gap (2)**

Activities promoted by the Women's Desk, for example, are too broad and it does appear the guiding principle here is that anything concerning women is worth pursuing. The Women's Desk activities tend to divert into areas that reinforce women's traditional roles, and do very little in terms of challenging the status quo.

And the trend study report concluded that:

The concerns of the Women's Desk remain varied and the focus appears to be too broad, which tends to blur the primary concern, increasing participation of women in trade union activities both qualitatively and quantitatively. The focus on women also helps to create an impression that the low female participation is a woman's problem and not one of gender. The capacity of the Women's Desk to make an impact requires a closer examination.

*Source:* Britwum 2000a and Britwum (unpublished).

## Challenges of Tackling Gender Democracy

The problems of tackling gender democracy within the GTUC are conceptual, inadequate infrastructure and organisational. At the conceptual level the policy focus has been on women ignoring the social gender relations. As a result the Women's Desk in some instances has supported activities that promote the notion that women's lack of ability is the cause of their low participation in union activities. Graham explains that women's only focus rests within the conceptual flaws in the GTUC and its national affiliates understanding of gender relations. For him,

... the history of the GTUC Women's Desk, and the associated evolution of the movement's policy on women, confirms the impression that the main concern of the trade union's gender policy was not a comprehensive concern about gender equality and gender sensitivity. The main concern has been to increase the participation women in trade union, including their representation in decision-making structures ... (Graham 2001, 314–5).

This concern, though legitimate, dodges the main cause of low union female participation and representation, which is social gender relations within the GTUC. The corresponding strategies tackle the symptoms and this accounts for the slow progress, with which the GTUC is dissatisfied. The 2004 policy attempts to shift this female focus to involve men in its activities but this is done outside the context of a gender analysis of trade union structures. The low impact of GTUC's efforts in implementing a gender policy over a nearly a decade is a feature that Costello and Stone (2001) observed for the American trade unions. Their conclusion in this particular instance was that women's continued under-representation in trade union leadership roles, despite all the 'best practices', can only be addressed by a complete change in union culture. Which change should be directed at making unions gender-sensitive?

Using the experience of two Norwegian universities, Tjomslund (unpublished) observes how a vibrant women's movement operating within the social system can put pressure on public institutions to become gender-sensitive. In Ghana one cannot talk of the existence of a women's movement in the sense of a strong independent political mass women's movement pursuing systematic activities directed towards bringing change into the lives of women by consistently engaging with public policy (Tsikata 2001). Such a movement could, in many ways, have offered support to institutional engendering and provided greater conceptual clarity for organisations like the GTUC to promote gender democracy. Women's groups and associations engaged in political or development-related struggle date back to pre-colonial times when women in traditional societies organised to defend their social rights (*ibid.*). At present the situation is very different. With the exception of advocacy-based NGOs that attempt to ensure that government policies are gender-sensitive, the others are basically women-focused and attempt to provide assistance to members and/or carry out welfare activities for less privileged women and other sections of Ghanaian society.

As a mass organisation it is important if women's interests within the GTUC can be founded on grassroots workplace action. But women's committees as they operate in GTUC cannot be said to be self-organised groups in the sense that, though



they happen to be women-only groups, they are not grassroots organisations that have emerged out of a need to fight for a common interest. They operate more as bureaucratic structures carrying out structured activities that tend to promote the status quo. Even though they are considered part of GTUC's structures, their representatives serve as ex officio members on all these structures, a point that emphasises their peripheral location within the union structure. Here we find in operation what Graham, citing Longwe, describes as procedures and attitudes that make for ineffectual organisational change, such as compartmentalisation and tokenism. This involves setting up separate women's sections on the periphery of decision-making structures and recruiting people with little power to face the resistance of the dominant group. The head of the gender desk as a deputy head of department has little authority to initiate and effect change within GTUC governing structures where she operates as an ex officio member.

The GTUC remains outside the fight for gender equality. Most of the legislative gains achieved in protecting the rights of women generally and working women in particular have been attributed to progressive governments like the CPP and the PNDC and the military government of the Supreme Military Council, as well as national responses to UN conventions and provisions to promote the rights of women (see Tsikata 2001 and Arthur 2002). Its involvement in social change has concentrated generally on social situations that have impacted on the social life of workers. In the specific instance of promoting the rights of working women and ending gender discrimination in the workplace, the efforts of the GTUC do not extend beyond issues outlawed by the ILO (Graham 2001). In terms of efforts to end gender discrimination the GTUC has remained a 'traveller and not a leader' (*ibid.*, 310), as has been the case for other social issues where it has taken a frontal position. GTUC cannot be credited for having used its own understanding of gender relations as a basis for demanding policy or legislative changes. It is also absent from the national space of political activism on issues of gender discrimination. Debates on gender issues at the national level are left to female trade unionists, and the majority of male members of the unions remain outside the fight for gender equality in the workplace and beyond (*ibid.*).

The conceptual and organisational problems of tackling gender democracy within the GTUC are compounded by infrastructural constraints. A 1997 Women's Desk report outlined financial constraints as one of its numerous problems. The Women's Desk is under-resourced in terms of office equipment, personnel, means of transport and finances to carry out its activities. As a desk it shares the same administrative and physical space with the Youth and Informal Sector Desks. The Women's Desk has relied on the largesse of donors (in the form of foreign labour centres and bilateral donor institutions) to perform its functions. The majority of activities reported by the Women's Desk in 1997, for example, were activities of NGOs that the members of the Desk had been involved in. A substantial proportion of its educational programmes are directed by the concerns of donor agencies, foreign labour centres and global trade union bodies. The generosity of these institutions has been remarkable in keeping the Women's Desk operating until now. Internally generated union funds made available to grow and develop the Women's Desk will go a long way to enhance commitment of the entire leadership.

Other problems of the Desk are lack of support from some regional industrial relations officers located in the regional secretariats of the GTUC, local union executives and management of some workplaces. The report on its activities noted organisational problems, such as language barriers in some cases and a lack of communication between it and other GTUC structures. There was very little information sharing between the Women's Desk of the GTUC and the national women's committees of the national unions as well as the general decision-making structures of the GTUC (GTUC 1997). Clearly, the GTUC in its own assessment admits that there is the need to re-strategise its efforts at improving gender democracy.

## **Conclusion**

The strongest point of the GTUC's strategies to improve gender democracy has been in the area of affirmative action, which has taken three forms: the creation of women's self-organising units in the form of women's wings and committees; the institution of quotas (the creation of special seats for women with voting powers on union governing bodies) and constitutional amendments to secure legitimacy of these provisions within union structures. The women's self-organising body has grown over a period of 15 years from the enterprise level to the district through to the regional and finally the national level. These bodies have constitutional recognition to operate as integral parts of the district and regional consultative bodies of the GTUC. The national women's committee is yet to enjoy such a position vis-à-vis the Executive Board to allow its deliberations to impact upon mainstream GTUC decision making through the Executive Board.

The GTUC has made considerable progress in its affirmative action provisions of creating quotas and special seats as a means for increasing female representation on its governing structures and ad hoc committees. Female participation in decision making, which made a dramatic increase of over 186 per cent in a period of eight years, would not have been possible without the affirmative action provisions. Yet the GTUC laments that the rate of increase still falls below its targeted annual 30 per cent.

The account of gender democracy within the GTUC has revealed how, despite almost one decade of consistent efforts to address women's unusually low representation and participation, the impact has been limited. Women workers' situations and needs derive from (first) their gendered positioning within society and (secondly) their lack of rights as workers. This second fact they share with working men. Our discussions have revealed that male dominance in union affairs marginalises working women's concerns and the ability of unions to defend those concerns. Affirmative action provisions that have focused on women union members have avoided the underlying structural inequalities and power dimensions of gender relations that trade unions structures recreate in a patriarchal society. And this is what the questionnaire survey concludes (see Box 10.9).

**Box 10.9 Re-strategising for greater union gender democracy**

Very little attention has been paid to examining the structure and character of trade unions in Ghana and the ways in which they tend to promote male dominance in union activities. Skills and capacities that make for successful union participation continue to be determined by the male standard created by the traditional male dominant formal sector workplace.

The policy implications point to the need for union activists to understand better the structure of trade unions themselves and their propensity to promote a male dominant character. This calls for a comprehensive study to understand the dynamism of patriarchy and how it is played out in the trade unions. An examination of the Ghanaian image of an ideal woman shows the extent to which it is in conflict with the image of an ideal union activist.

*Source:* Britwum 2000a.

McBride agrees with writers who prescribe measures that guarantee women space to develop their collective ideas and determine their own interests away from the influence of the privileged group as the primary means for improving women's representation. The advantages of self-organised women's groups are that they are capable of challenging male norms that underpin present forms of trade unionism because they provide women as an oppressed social group, rather than individuals, with new source of authority and influence. Thus, when women's self-organisation is strengthened with resources, decision-making powers, protective mandates, direct input into organisational decision making, links to the collective bargaining process and union-wide communication potential, then union structures stand a better chance of getting transformed into gender-sensitive organisations (McBride 2001). The GTUC has the basic organisational structure for promoting women's self-organisation, its own women's wing and the women's committees located in its affiliated national unions. What remains to be determined is how these organs can provide women trade unionists with an avenue into mainstream trade union structures to influence decisions and make union structures more gender-democratic.

It is not enough to assess workplace democratic participation and to examine the adequacy of structures set up to provide workers with the opportunity to make important inputs into decisions on issues of enterprise-level development and national policy direction. The character of the structure itself and its ability to accommodate the diverse interests of the people it purports to represent is very crucial. Our examination has shown that trade union institutions as social institutions reproducing social gender inequalities cannot be good vehicles for pursuing workplace democracy if there is no conscious effort to change. The change calls for structural and organisational reforms. This will first demand a better understanding of patriarchy and how unions as representative institutions of workers are gendered to support male power. It will also call for a systematic education of all union members at the workplace and leaders within the union bureaucracy. The emerging policy

will, of course, have to look within the GTUC and the Ghanaian workplace as well. But the strength of the GTUC's policy will be located within its ability to provide leadership on national gender debates.

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PART 3  
Policy Conclusions

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## Chapter 11

# Towards More Meaningful and Effective Workplace Democracy

The case studies of workplace democracy reported in Chapters 7 and 8 offer the possibility of comparative exploration of the state of the art of workplace democracy in a number of African countries, but do not allow generalisation for sub-Saharan Africa. In view of the distribution of the studies over different parts of Africa (south, south-east and west), with different labour relations patterns (francophone and anglophone), and accumulating a wide variety of formal and informal workplace democracy, the comparative data may be inferred to constitute a sufficient basis for a generalised comparative *appreciation* of the structures and functioning of workplace democracy. And on the basis of this exploration, a discussion may be ventured on how workplace participation can be made more meaningful, effective and democratic. In Chapter 3, on the theory of participation it was argued that the dynamics of participation rest, among other factors, on the improvement of its form and functioning, following evaluation. What are the learning lessons?

### **Summing up the Learning Experiences**

#### *The structure of participation*

The *formal status* of participation is very weak. In practically all case study reports the lack of legal support is mentioned as problem number one. In the country where worker participation was once heralded as one of the showpieces of its ideology, Tanzania, workers' councils were introduced by presidential decree and subsequent presidential guidelines, but were never given legal support. How vulnerable this basis was appeared when the country liberalised its economy under a multi-party state: decree and guidelines only applied to the (rapidly shrinking!) public sector. Except for Zimbabwe, no concrete legal basis or framework exists today for the pursuit of worker participation in the countries studied. And where legal provisions are provided, in South Africa, they are hardly made use of.

In several countries safety and health committees exist which have a reference in labour policy or even labour legislation, but this only provides a framework of guidelines and is not strictly regulating rights and duties of the parties involved. Thus it can happen, like in Burkina Faso, that by far the majority of work organisations have no safety and health committee, and this is likely to be the case also in Guinea, where none of the case studies mentions the existence of such bodies. By and large, workers' participation is practised on a 'benevolent' basis. No guidelines exist that



lay down the rules of the game, and procedures are almost invariably left to the discretion of management. And indeed, in several countries studied, management has become the initiator of participation.

The absence of legal rights and duties with respect to structure and functioning of worker participation bodies obviously exposes these bodies to the balance of power between the parties. The consequence is clear from the case studies: the right of control of the 'owner' of the firm (whether state or private) is legally protected, and rejection or acceptance and eventual implementation of decisions reached through participation remain at the discretion of these same owners. The latter can, literally, take it or leave it.

The *composition* of the participation bodies expresses its power balance. As seen in the cases in the countries covered by this research, the normal picture is that of a mixed composition: representatives of workers and of management, mostly in numerical balance. Only in two instances are the workers in majority. In the workers' councils in Tanzania, worker representatives are in majority, but the main worker block consists of all members of the company's trade union committee who are *ex officio* included, and only a minority of directly elected representatives from the different strata of employees in the enterprise. Yet the workers' council executive committee is numerically dominated by management representatives, and holds a strategic position: it sets the agenda and is supposed to execute the council's decisions. In Zimbabwe the workers' committee is exclusively composed of elected worker representatives, but is in fact only the *antichambre* of the workers' council: the main task of this committee is to prepare itself and propose items for the agenda of the works council where consultations are held in parity representation between management and worker representatives. Thus, more or less generally, formal and less formal participation institutions in the countries reviewed are joint consultation bodies with a balanced representation of both workers and management. The eventual outcome of this balance obviously depends on how the structures function.

The case studies conclude that the worker representatives were *democratically elected*. In some countries, such as Tanzania, proportional representation of different categories of workers was assured, and in several other countries (Mali, Zimbabwe and South Africa, for instance) arrangements existed to have a representative from each section or department of an enterprise. No cases were reported where management appointed worker representatives. In some countries the trade union committee of a firm was part of the participation procedure. In Mali this was on an observer status, in Tanzania it was a major characteristic of the workers' council as the entire trade union committee were *ex officio* council members and constituted the biggest proportion of the worker representatives. It is known from the questionnaire survey data that 90 per cent of the trade union committee members in Tanzania were democratically elected by secret or open ballot (Chambua 2002, 146), but they were not directly elected to the council by the workers of the enterprise. Also in other countries trade union officials were often members of participation structures, but elected by the entire workforce in that capacity.

A common problem is the *under-representation of women* in these participatory structures, and this is due to a complex of reasons. There are relatively few women with a tenured contract in the formal sector, and there are many cultural reasons as

well, as was analysed in Chapter 10. Women are under-represented in grassroots trade union structures, and have hardly any access to national trade union leadership. The social and cultural context is unfavourable to women's participation in public affairs in general and within trade unions in particular. Even though women have often been very active in collective action, they mainly disappeared when trade unions and employers started to negotiate or when participatory institutions were created (Adu-Amankwah and Kester 1999, 26ff). In Guinea, eight out of ten committees had only one female member: the secretary for social affairs, in charge of traditional female tasks such as serving coffee or tea at meetings (Diallo et al. 1992, 65–8). At the workplace, in trade union structures as well as in participation forums, the under-representation of women implies that their distinct needs are not adequately represented. The male-dominated patriarchal society on which Akua Britwum elaborated in Chapter 10 can only be broken up by institutional and organisational measures, as well as affirmative action provisions. If not, she warns, the increase in women's seats on representation bodies is likely to remain tokenism.

The Ghana researchers report that *hardly any young persons* are to be found among the representatives in participatory structures; in fact only one out of ten is under 30 years of age (Agbesinyale 2000a, 126), and this is in line with the generalised under-representation of young people in trade union representation (see Chapter 6, as well as a special chapter on the under-representation of youth in Mali in Coulibaly et al. 2000, 61–9).

Another important formal aspect of the participation structures is the *degree of participation*: do the worker representatives have the right of information, consultation, co-decision or veto? As is clear from all case study reports, the joint bodies are primarily information and consultation channels, and not co-determination bodies. And if these bodies come to joint decisions, these have only advisory status, as in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where such advice is submitted to the board of directors, where the actual decisions are made. The worker representatives on the joint committees are not represented at board level, but management is. This makes worker participation inconclusive: the board can take the advice or leave it, and there are no mechanisms that confer power on the worker representatives to pursue any decision ignored or rejected at higher managerial or policy-making levels. Also, the one symbolic worker director in Zimbabwe or the union-appointed director in Tanzania could not make the difference, according to the case studies (see Chapter 8).

Unless the forms of participation had a purposely defined function, like health and safety committees, funeral committee, promotion committee, etc., there appear to be no restrictions on *the matters that may come up for discussion*: from the itinerary of a company bus to a major investment plan. It also shows that matters that concern the terms of the employment contract (wages, allowances, retrenchment, overtime payment, etc.), in other words the traditional collective bargaining issues, are as much the subjects of discussion as items related to the economy, the organisation, the production and the management of the workplaces. This is confirmed in the questionnaires where the respondents were asked to list the issues discussed in participatory committees: in fact collective bargaining issues are the main issues

mentioned.<sup>1</sup> Only in some cases was a strict demarcation between bargaining and participation maintained, in particular in South Africa, and this may be explained by the relatively much greater power of the trade unions in that country. Later in this chapter the relation between trade unions and worker participation will be taken up in more detail.

A further characteristic of almost all participation is its *restriction to one level* of the entire decision-making structure: the executive management level. Only in three countries is representation at company policy level mentioned. In Tanzania the trade union appointed one trade union representative on the board of directors of public companies, but the case study results suggested that this structure did not effectively link to participation at a lower level. Rather, it must be feared that the trade union board members were watchdogs of the single political party, as is suggested by the fact that they were appointed by the highest authority of the trade union federation which was for long close to the single party. Privatisation is expected to gradually put an end to this board representation. The case studies in Ghana report that worker representation on the board occurred in public companies, but under privatisation this and several other forms of worker representation discontinued.

### *The functioning of participation*

The previous remarks on participation practice addressed the structures; how did these function in practice? Here, a number of further weaknesses come to the fore. Apart from Zimbabwe and Tanzania, the *procedures* of participation were not laid down, or were left to the discretion of the parties to a given participatory institution. Consequently, the best informed, the most educated and, in particular, those with most power dominated the participatory meetings. In most countries, management chaired the participation meetings, even sometimes when the rules and regulations prescribed differently. Also, when a certain minimal frequency of meetings was stipulated, as in Tanzania, this was not always adhered to. No regular meetings took place of the workers' council executive committee which had to follow up the council's deliberations. Both in Zimbabwe and Tanzania, worker representatives only took part in debates on worker issues, and dozed away when other items were discussed.

In Tanzania the *agenda* was prepared by management and this was considered one of the main weaknesses of the workers' councils (Chambua 2002, 185). This weakness was overcome in Zimbabwe through the workers' committee, composed of only worker representatives. In the committee the workers could meet independently, without any management present, study the documents for the council (these were in all cases studied provided in time, one week in advance – see Chapter 8), prepare

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1 Open-ended questions were asked in the questionnaires on the items discussed in works councils or other relevant participation bodies in the country concerned. The different codification and other technical problems do not allow a presentation of comparative data. From available statistics it appears that in Ghana, Tanzania and Mali more than one third of the items mentioned concerned the terms of employment and constituted the most prominent kind of issues in the practice of worker participation.

a stand, choose the best spokesperson and identify issues they wanted to be on the council agenda. To no surprise, the items on the agenda in Zimbabwe reflected much more the issues of importance to workers than in Tanzania.

Whether the worker representatives had access or not to establishing the agenda, insurmountable problems did arise when it came to *information* and *communication*. In Tanzania documents were made available shortly before or just at the workers' council meetings, so that they could not be studied by the representatives, and no consultations could take place beforehand. Moreover, all documents were confidential so that they could not be passed on for advice or to the workers the representatives represented. Furthermore, there was a problem of *language*; the majority of representatives could not read the documents as these were in English; they also could not express themselves in English during the council meetings, giving another opportunity to management to dominate the discussions. The language problem was not mentioned in the Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea cases (French is more widely spoken as a *lingua franca*), but as in the other cases it was stipulated that the available documents were difficult to understand for non-professionals.

Moreover, case study data shows communication breakdown of another type: between the worker representatives and the rank and file. Workers at the grassroots level are left in the dark on the deliberations of the participatory structures, and any record of meetings in the form of *minutes* is often conspicuously absent. In Tanzania, minutes of the workers' council meetings are made, but they are confidential. Yet the workers could not accept that and complained bitterly that their representatives did not inform them of the deliberations and results of the council meetings (Musa et al. 1997). In the sugar plant case study (see Chapter 8) it was found that the problems of the workers were not on the agenda of the workers' council, pointing at the lack of communication between workers and representatives. There is no doubt that minutes are important for the institutional memory within a participation context: a record of previous decisions for future reference. The ever-returning items on the agenda in a number of countries point at the absence of an institutional memory. The general impression is that minute taking and distribution were not common practice.

Of course the problem of *information* at the level of the worker representatives is also aggravated by the fact that – as was reported in Chapter 6 – the majority of them state they have no knowledge of nor access to existing labour legislation. This was worst in Ghana where over 90 per cent of the respondents had no access to a single piece of labour legislation and where 81 per cent could not *mention any labour law* in the country (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 67).

In Zimbabwe the works councils were set up as a *trait d'union* between management and the workplace, but the worker representatives found it difficult to consult or inform their constituencies, and were sometimes deliberately prevented from doing so (see Chapter 8). Schiphorst wonders why management did not create mechanisms through which worker representatives could give feedback to their members and thus communicate to all workers, as the councils were hailed as a communication channel between management and labour. He suggests that this may be explained as an attempt to contain or control a structured labour response (Schiphorst 2001, 360), thus feeding the manipulation scenario. In Tanzania, workers could not be informed, as the documents, deliberations and minutes of workers'

council meetings were confidential. Where worker representation is channelled through trade unions, as in Ghana, there is no positive news either: 'there was ample evidence from the survey to show that severe linkage and communication gaps exist between the leadership and the grassroots. The concerns of the grassroots are hardly articulated at the top to the extent that many of the local union bodies feel alienated' (Agbesinyale 2000a, 128).

Because of the lack of legal backing, and despite management's assurances that workers are free to air their opinions, some workers have *expressed fears of dismissal if they speak out*. The presence of their heads of department or section in a participatory meeting makes it difficult for the worker representatives to air their views freely, let alone to criticise their own managers. The worker representatives have developed their own tactics to avoid victimisation. In a Tanzanian private company, some worker representatives believe that they 'have to keep quiet' (Chambua 2002, 166). In Zimbabwe, the case studies report most frequently about the fear of victimisation. This fear sometimes prompts persons not to stand for election. Once elected, representatives may face being put on difficult shifts, being transferred to workplaces where they are cut off from regular communication with fellow workers they represent, or even being promoted to higher positions (thus automatically disqualifying him/her from representing workers), sometimes even with the ultimate aim of demoting the person after new elections (see Chapter 8). Ghana also reports mention cases of victimisation.

The functioning of participation also suffered under the meagre *track record*: results of interest to workers were few, so that the representatives had little news to bring, other than informing their constituency of particular management decisions. It was interesting to see how in Zambia, at the time, management 'stole' popular issues from the trade union agenda to deal with them in the works council, when they believed they had some solution to offer in favour of the workers, and wanted to get the credit.

### *The support for participation*

The weak functioning of the participation bodies in the countries studied has, in particular, structural causes and therefore it will not be easy to overcome them. Throughout the case study reports, there is emphasis on the lack of the most minimal facilities (like a place to meet, a place to file documents, communication or transport), lack of time off during working time to prepare for meetings, or to consult and inform constituencies, lack of competence in preparing and taking part in meetings, and so on. And above all, education and training are in very short supply. The survey results had already shed light on the severe shortage of resources among elected trade union representatives: no facilities, no resources, no access to the most basic labour documents (see Chapter 6). In some cases there was support for worker representatives (most evidently in the Dunlop case in Zimbabwe), but more generally such support was often lacking, or deliberately withheld (Zambia).

The lesson is clear: even if the participation bodies had been potentially more effective (in structure and procedure), it is uncertain whether the worker representatives would have been able to get much more out of them than was now

the case. The development of participation in Africa needs more effective forms of participation in terms of structure and functioning but, in particular, to create the conditions for worker representatives to make use of these effective participation forms which have to be created to bring about competent sparring partners.

Summing up, it may be concluded, as already submitted in Chapters 7 and 8, that *workplace democracy was meaningful, increasingly democratic, but hardly effective*. Workers and worker representatives gained access to information on a wide range of issues which could help them to make better-informed demands. It offered opportunities for consultation and could lead to obtaining certain material benefits. More striking was the number of obstacles to effective participation: poor communication of information (also between representatives and workers), the mere advisory status of the participatory structures, the lack of legal backing, the under-representation of women, the danger of management manipulation, victimisation and, above all, the lack of adequate education and training of the worker representatives. The explanation for the relative failure of the experience with participation does not, however, lie in the inherent weaknesses of the idea, but rather in the fact that the conditions for the development of participation were not available. What failed was not participation, but the way it was implemented (Kester and Sidibé 1997, 9).

### **How to Make Worker Participation More Effective, Meaningful and Democratic**

As was argued in Chapter 3, workers' participation should be seen as a dynamic process which has to be constantly proposed and learned. Achievements need to be defended and new challenges have to be met. On the basis of the evaluation of the learning experiences presented above, a number of propositions necessary for creating more appropriate conditions for workplace democracy and its practical implementation will now be formulated. Creating conditions has to be undertaken at several levels. The first is the design of the appropriate participation institutions; this concerns the formal structure. The second is the practice or the functioning of these institutions and the infrastructure. Thirdly, the conditions have to be created so that these institutions can function effectively and can adjust to new situations. This level is concerned with such important attributes as education and training, research and monitoring, co-operation between universities and trade unions, trade union support structures and financial support.

*The design of participation institutions: checklist for the improvement of the structure of workplace democracy* A major difficulty encountered in the functioning of participation is the (formal) structure of participation. In the practice of many countries, much of what is worker or trade union participation is informal or occurring in a framework in which no rights and duties are established for the parties taking part. This is as much true for the Ghanaian durbars and for the rather common general assemblies as for many of the workers' committees and works councils, as well as (and perhaps even more) for other forms of voluntary or informal participation.

The *composition* of the participation institutions is a first important issue. Shall the participatory structures be constituted of mixed worker–management representation or of exclusive worker representation? Here, two different ‘philosophies’ of worker participation are at stake. In a mixed composition the underlying idea is that consensus may be reached to solve common problems, sharing executive management on a number of issues. In an exclusive worker representatives’ composition the underlying idea is to create a ‘shadow board’, making management accountable to labour just as management is answerable to a board of directors who represent the interests of capital owners, even if only on a (very) limited number of issues. It thus recognises that both labour and capital contribute to the result of an enterprise. A workers’ council is not executive management-oriented but policy-oriented: its main role is not to *share* executive management but to *control* management in the way it manages.

It may well be desirable to have both kinds of institutions at the same time: one for sharing certain aspects of management in which both have a special stake, and another for sharing policy control. In practice, in many European countries, sharing executive management is done via various forms of direct participation, and workers’ councils exert policy sharing. Practical considerations point at a preference for exclusive worker representative bodies when policy making is at stake. As practically all case studies show, the worker representatives are often outwitted by management which has better access to information and a higher level of competence and, if embarrassed, management can always refer to higher level decision-making levels that have to be consulted and where the final decision making takes place, beyond worker representation.

*Gender representation* It should be assumed that participation becomes *more democratic* to the extent it involves women in the actual practice of participation and thus enables women to represent their specific needs. Male and female workers have many problems in common but women encounter special problems due to discrimination (in salary, promotions, benefits and dismissal), health and safety issues, maternity leave, night work, sexual harassment and equal pay for work of equal value.

Efforts need to be pursued to integrate women into mainstream participation structures. Seats should be reserved for women and a percentage quota adopted for women in decision-making structures. Supportive conditions are necessary to realise this (crèches, infant schools, etc.) in order to relieve women from domestic work and give them realistic opportunities to be involved in participation organs. The data available from APADEP research suggest that a combination of awareness, education and positive discrimination can help. Measures of positive discrimination appear indispensable for the promotion of women in organs of representation and participation. In Tanzania, measures of positive discrimination to ensure the representation of women on various organs of unions are favourably viewed and have already given good results (Adu-Amankwah and Kester 1999, 31).

The position of women is deeply entrenched in the tradition of many countries. Patriarchal relationships at home continue at the enterprise. But it is also a question of changing mentalities. This requires, beyond the measures proposed above, the

introduction of this subject in awareness programmes aimed at men and women and the provision of proper training for women in all the fields where they are under-represented. It must be said that, indeed, a lot of positive change is taking place. A regular feature of many education and training seminars now is a quota for women's participation (under considerable donor insistence). Many national federations and affiliated trade unions have launched special confidence-raising programmes for women.

*Legal support* Legal facilitation is important, not only for the creation of participatory rights but also for ensuring procedural mechanisms for implementation. For participation and, in turn, democracy itself to be sustainable, a legal culture of rights and duties must underpin them. As long as managerial prerogatives derive from property ownership, and these rights are legally protected, only legal provisions can change this unilateral owners' power. Otherwise, labour will remain at the mercy of capital. Where participation legislation exists it was introduced under the recognition that labour as the weaker partner should get legal support to obtain information, consultation or co-determination rights.

The predicament of the lack of legislation on worker participation was in particular felt in Tanzania, where, Chambua reports, almost all workers and managers were in favour of legalising participation, firstly to provide them legal protection against victimisation, secondly to gain clarity in rights and duties under participation schemes (Chambua 2002, 169). Moreover, since the presidential directives only applied to the public sector which is rapidly shrinking, the trade unions want legislation to eventually also apply to the private sector. The trade unions are aware that this will be difficult to sell to foreign investors who will see such legal imposition as unnecessary interference with management prerogatives, but they also realise that without legislation workers' councils will soon be defunct – so they have pressed the government for enactment of a law on participation which also covers the private sector (*ibid.*, 113). This proposal was accepted and a cabinet paper was prepared, but a change in ministers delayed the process. Chambua insists that trade unions should continue to lobby political leaders on the relation between worker participation and democracy to which they are committed, to make worker participation sustainable through legal facilitation (*ibid.*, 189). Also Agbesinyale believes that legislation of participation is crucial precisely in view of privatisation, as the new management of private enterprises is shutting the door on worker participation (see the Ghana case studies in Chapter 7). Agbesinyale continues: 'organised labour must demonstrate visibly to all, especially government and employers, the value of participation, ... that employers stand to benefit from participation'. Labour legislation must, further, establish a mandatory system that guarantees access to information on the economic objectives and performance of the company (Agbesinyale 2000, 131–2). Also, the Guinea researchers plead for participation legislation as part of the government's responsibility for deepening democracy (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 100–1); and in Mali the researchers propose that legislation be introduced and broadened to give worker representatives the right to devote time to their representative functions during working hours, and to support education and research facilities of the trade union



movement in the development of democratic participation (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 99).

These observations and recommendations of the researchers are well-supported by international opinion. Markey and Monat, when reviewing works councils' experiences the world over, conclude that 'without legislation which defines and guarantees their powers and composition, works councils may not be secure from managerial or union encroachments on their independence', and 'legislation ensures the neutrality of participative structures free from the impositions in whichever party is favoured by the balance of power' (Markey and Monat 1997, 417). Otherwise, added Hammer, participation becomes dependent on the goodwill, trust and power relations between the parties (quoted in Markey and Gollan 2001, 335), and this is precisely what the case studies reported in Chapters 7 and 8 point out. Hammer further says that, apart from formalising, labour legislation also *legitimises* participation forms (*ibid.*).

*Degree and scope of participation* As for the *degree of participation* a major dividing line can be drawn between consultative participation and co-determination. In the first the worker representatives are consulted but management determines which issues are discussed and ultimately the decisions are determined by the management's preferences. This form of participation has been called *pseudo-participation* (see Chapter 3). Under co-determination participation can become effective: issues initiated by worker representatives themselves can lead to decisions that also take into account worker preferences. These co-decision rights need to be formally regulated, legally if possible (Pateman 1970 and Bernstein 1976).

The range of decisions over which worker representatives exercise influence is the *scope of participation*: from decisions at the shop floor to decisions on the overall business policy of a workplace. A major debate in participation policy is whether participation should concentrate on an involvement in executive management or on policy control. Many have been the warnings against 'tea, towel and toilet participation' – worker participation on trivial matters, at the cost of participation on matters which have more important consequences for the workers. What are priority areas of participation? From the research results in Chapter 5 it can be seen that 'tea, towels and toilets' are not trivial matters in many African workplaces, nor indeed is the availability of safe drinking water! Basic working and welfare conditions should be important concerns of effective worker participation. But should participation stop here? As has been demonstrated by the opinions of the majority of the interviewed worker representatives, questions of personnel policy, organisation and production, as well as of general business policy, are matters on which effective participation is also needed.

This implies that the ambitions with respect to the scope of democratic participation go beyond the desire to establish a more humane workplace together with management. They include the desire for *sharing democratic control* over the policy of the company, in other words, to co-determination in addition to consultative participation or participative management. This introduces the principle that the policy of the workplace is not an exclusive prerogative of owners and management but a prerogative that should be shared with workers, who are also partners and

stakeholders in the production process. The challenge of designing forms of democratic workplace participation, then, is to make participation more effective and meaningful by involving workers in the decisions relating to their immediate work environment and to also give them access to policy decisions that affect them: their employment, their professional advancement (vocational education and training) and their future (the continuity of the company is also a worker interest).

The degree and scope of participation can be progressively developed over time. The experience in other countries, notably in Western Europe, has been that participation has *gradually* become more effective and meaningful. A high degree of participation (co-decision) on questions of workplace policy on crucial matters for workers (such as employment consequences of investment decisions and training opportunities when major re-organisations take place) was obtained after a long struggle. Co-decision rights on questions of crucial importance for workers should be the aim to ensure that participation becomes a real expression of democracy as it places the 'governance' of the company under democratic control. A power game with owners and managers is unavoidable – any infringement of their prerogatives is seen as intrusion. As these prerogatives are protected by company laws (dating back in many cases to colonial times), making the workplace democratic implies a struggle and can only be achieved by a change in legislation.

In the case of Tanzania's more long-standing experience with consultative participation in Africa, many representatives are claiming that they should be represented there where the decisions are actually made; notably, in most cases, on the board of directors. And they want workers' councils to be given final decision-making power on issues that do not need board approval (Chambua 2002, 169). Different complementary forms of participation create linkages and make worker participation more effective (*ibid.*, 190). This was also the conclusion of Heller et al. when they reviewed participation experience in Europe: they plead for interlocking forms of participation (Heller et al. 1998).

*The performance of workplace democratisation: checklist for the improvement of the functioning of workplace democracy* Even the best design may be of little use if minimal conditions are not created. It is important to provide suitable procedures to ensure that participation rights and duties are effectively implemented. Procedures may, for instance, relate to election, accountability to constituency, information and communication, logistics, expert advice and financial support.

The case studies have demonstrated many weaknesses that need to be overcome. A possible checklist of important matters is as follows:

- procedures for secret ballot election should be established
- the duration of mandates should be determined and adhered to
- procedures of accountability to constituencies should be established and adhered to
- meetings of participation organs should take place in working time
- elected representatives should have time off for preparation and follow up
- they should be protected against victimisation

- information regarding decisions to be taken should be submitted to the representatives well ahead of the time meetings are held
- there should be procedures to handle possible disputes
- there should be administrative, secretarial and organisational support (such as a meeting place, or possibly a permanent office, access to telecommunication, secretarial services, facilities to file documentation, and so on)
- there should be a possibility of getting expert advice on agenda items of crucial importance for workers
- there should be financial support to fulfil the above conditions as a regular part of the company budget.

*Collective bargaining, worker participation and trade unions*

Measures must be taken to ensure that workplace participation structures are not used to undermine trade unions and, conversely, that trade unions do not undermine participation. Workers' participation does not *replace* collective bargaining, but is an *additional instrument* for workers to represent their interests. The two forms of worker representation rest on different premises. Collective bargaining is a procedure by which trade unions negotiate terms of employment contracts of workers and a number of working conditions. The effectiveness of collective bargaining rests essentially on the balance of power between the two parties; that is, trade union and management (a balance likely to remain in favour of management for a long time to come in Africa). Collective bargaining is essentially adversarial: it requires an autonomous and independent opposition from the side of the trade union whose major strength lies in its membership, its resources and its independence. Participation is a procedure by which workers or worker representatives take part in workplace decision making and this may cover the entire spectrum of workplace management and policy. Participation extends to all workers. Worker participation gives workers a 'voice' and this faculty of expression is a fundamental component of the integrity and dignity of each human being and has in that spirit has been included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This right is independent of trade union membership.

The case studies reported in Chapters 7 and 8 have shown that relations between adversarial trade union structures and participation forums are very complex and full of pitfalls and there were almost as many complexities as there were cases. The two channels of representation were often in competition, in the absence of clear rules and regulations governing participation in decision making. The same issues were dealt with by trade unions in their own way and by participation forums in another. This may either bring the trade union into an awkward position or discredit participation. For instance, in Zimbabwe the trade union bargained a bottom-line collective agreement per industry, and the terms of that agreement could be further negotiated, by either the workplace trade union or by the works' council. In Zambia one of the formal tasks of the works council was to be the watchdog of the implementation of collective agreements concluded between management and the trade union. Many trade union officers were also elected members on participation forums. If they had played different roles in different positions there would not have been a problem,

but as these roles were not clearly defined this brought confusion. The consequences of 'representation overlap' were serious at times. Management would deal with any issue where it had best control: that could be the trade union structure or participation. It 'stole' issues from the union agenda to deal with them under participation if it felt stronger there, or vice versa. Another consequence was confrontation between trade unions and directly elected workers. In the HUICOMA case in Mali, for example, worker representatives and trade union representatives were 'defaming each other' and created separate and competing 'islands of representation'. In Zambia, exchange of minutes that could allow co-operation and co-ordination was refused.

There was a discernible tendency among trade union officers to be apprehensive about participation, to fear that it undermined traditional trade union activity, in particular collective bargaining as an instrument of negotiation. Such apprehension is understandable, given the possible manipulation of participation by government and management. Trade unions do not wish their bargaining role to be eroded. Yet in the countries where participation forums were practically non-existent (Burkina Faso and Guinea), the unions tried to add influence on workplace decision making to their bargaining agenda. This appeared very difficult if not impossible in situations of multi-unionism, as in Burkina Faso and Guinea, and was further aggravated by the burden of residual trade union traditions that undermined the legitimacy of the trade union as representative of all workers. Also, in Ghana, workers' hesitation in trusting their trade unions was reported in several cases.

The cases in South Africa showed how these two forms of representation can be kept separate: collective bargaining was conducted by the trade unions in sector bargaining councils and participation structures dealt exclusively with matters of management and organisation and, if possible, with company policy. In several cases a division of tasks was agreed on to deal with issues in one or other framework of representation; for instance, in the cases of GKN Sinter Metals and the Golden Arrow Bus Company. In the latter, a joint trade union forum suggested items for the agenda in the consultative committee (Chapter 7). These cases show that both collective bargaining and participation are forms of worker representation and may complement each other but, for that, close co-operation is necessary between trade union representatives and elected worker representatives on participatory forums in the same workplace. Another possible trade union stand is to support worker participation from outside, as a watchdog of the participation rights of all workers. This happened in the Apex Gweru plant case in Zimbabwe, when the trade union intervened in a crisis when all worker committee members resigned. The trade union negotiated the restoration of the participation rights and this was successful. It is interesting and relevant to note that afterwards there was a sharp increase in trade union membership (see Chapter 8).

The trade union relation to worker participation forums could thus be one of the following alternatives:

- The trade union sticks exclusively to adversarial bargaining and refuses to add any participatory role; it also opposes the introduction of worker participation forums and, if they are introduced, sabotages them.

- The trade union accepts that worker influence in company decision making is desirable, and claims that it should play this role on behalf of all workers, rejecting the functioning of separate participation forums. It ‘monopolises’ worker participation.
- The trade union accepts that there are two complementary channels of worker interest representation, one through trade union structures relating to its membership, and another one relating to all employees, whether unionised or not. It assures co-ordination and co-operation between the two frameworks.
- The trade union accepts the two channels of worker representation, defends the worker participation rights of the entire workforce, and undertakes to strengthen and increase the participation rights.

Trade unions make up their own policy and strategy and thus also their choice between the four options mentioned above. If they choose the third or final option, they need to be active in defining objectives and mechanisms of participation. Workers’ participation is about workers and more worker influence can only be obtained through struggle by a collective organisation, and that is the trade union. And if participation is introduced by employers or by government, it would appear better to have a trade union-supported participation forum than a management-supported one. Trade union opposition to participation may push the participation forums in the direction of management. The trade union fear for loss of membership is unfounded: if the trade union plays a strong and visible role in defending, supporting and improving worker participation, this is more likely to have a positive effect on membership. Conversely, if the participation forums lack trade union interests and support, they will be ‘patronised’ by management and employers who can then come to terms with worker representatives directly and will be tempted to alienate the trade union. This may *in extremis* lead to ‘trade union fall-out’.

*A framework for support: checklist for necessary investments in the support to workplace democracy and the development of democratic participation* The observation that participation is a dynamic ongoing process of policy and strategy formulation, of designing and re-designing structures and procedures, implies that it requires co-ordination, organisation and support. In the 1970s special departments were set up in several African countries to develop and support government-initiated participation schemes, as was the case with the erstwhile Department for Industrial Participatory Democracy in Zambia, or less formalised support structures in other countries. But these were set up to sell policies of the political one-party establishments. As participation was government-initiated and assisted, the ways and means to develop it were also provided by government and thus remained controlled ‘from above’: the participatory process was assimilated into the state apparatus (Kester 1992, 237). But elected worker representatives in participation forums expect support from the trade unions to make their participation more meaningful and effective, also during the 1970s and early 1980s when government was a moving force in participation development (Gogu e et al. 1992, 171). In Zambia, where as mentioned above, government had created a relatively important support structure,

elected worker representatives in the Copperbelt enterprises preferred trade union above government assistance (Chapter 8).

The trade union response to this challenge has been puzzling. Even where trade unions favoured participation, this positive attitude was not translated into a participation support policy (Gogué et al. 1992, 172). Representatives often complained bitterly about the fact that they lacked time, a meeting place, secretarial help, the means of communication and other facilities which might help them develop effective participation. They reproached the trade unions for not providing support (Kester and Nangati 1987, 71). The subsequent APADEP questionnaire surveys confirmed this in Guinea, Mali, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Ghana (Adu-Amankwah and Kester 1999). An interesting feature of European experience is that not only the institutions of participation were legalised, but also the support for its development. Funds for education, advice, logistic and administrative support, time, study, etc., have to be provided by law from the company budget in a number of countries (Kester and Pinaud 1996). These facilities were created, not least, through trade union struggle and tough trade union–management and trade union–government negotiations. But even then, support for the functioning and development of workplace democracy is not found sufficient in most studies: neither in the longitudinal European survey of Heller et al. (1998) nor in a cross-continental study of works councils (Markey and Monat 1997, 411ff).

*Education and training* The design of participation structures has to be upheld by the creation of a support framework consisting of ingredients that make implementation effective and sustainable. There is a whole range of such ingredients, and the most important of these are education, monitoring and research.

A recurrent major reason for the relative lack of success of participation was the absence of education and training, which are necessary to understand participation and to be capable of playing a significant role in it. The lack of education makes for passive participants in participatory forums and creates a feeling of inferiority among the worker representatives. And whatever the country, the respondents to the questionnaires invariably say that they expect training and education to be offered first and foremost by the trade unions.

It is important for trade unions to integrate worker participation education into their mainstream trade union educational programmes in order to ensure co-ordination and co-operation between trade union representation and worker participation at the workplace. Trade unions can develop their own educational materials based on their own concrete experience. They can, in conjunction with other stakeholders, work towards the promotion of a coherent democratic environment and culture, and promote education on democracy. The enormity of the task ahead can be illustrated by sheer numbers. It can be estimated that there must be at least one million elected trade and worker representatives in Africa, and it is only the ‘happy few’ who usually benefit from trade union or worker education offered. A case in point are the APADEP seminars. Despite systematic coverage all over the country, they reached only a minority of the elected representatives. In Tanzania, for instance, about 45 APADEP seminars, spread over five years, covered 1,800 representatives against a total of 38,000. In the 15 years of APADEP’s existence, just over 10,000

representatives took part in its educational activities; that is, one per cent of the estimated total of union representatives in Africa. Adding to this the rapid turnover of elected representatives (see Chapter 6), most of that one per cent is likely to have been meanwhile replaced.

*Monitoring and research* The point has been repeatedly made that participation should be seen as a dynamic process. In as much as it is a learning process, it is important to evaluate experience with the aim of drawing lessons for the future. It is difficult to imagine how progress can otherwise be made in making participation more meaningful and effective. In particular, frameworks are needed in which workers and worker representatives can convey their experiences regularly, in which they can articulate what they would like to implement in order to improve the functioning of participation.

The role of universities has to be discussed in this perspective. The traditional role of universities is to conduct research and give education, and provide service to society. The neo-liberal climate is, however, affecting universities all over the world which are fast becoming simple training grounds for professionals. Currently, 'it is accountants, business managers and engineers who dominate the academic scene, rubbing shoulders with lawyers and doctors rather than trade unionists' (Zammit 1996, 200). This is also the trend in Africa, where research and education on trade unions and labour relations have remained very weak. Leaders of future generations are moulded at universities. Such subjects as labour relations, trade unionism and democratic participation should be areas of interest in all parts of the educational system, since through education the future leaders in politics, government, management, media, non-governmental organisations, etc., are prepared. Universities have the responsibility to contribute to the development of democracy in all its facets. As public institutions they should be *bulwarks of democracy*. Universities should also not merely take up these issues for academic knowledge's sake only, but seek also to transmit specialised knowledge to those social actors who can use it profitably.

The situation in African universities is even worse when it comes to funds. The research budgets are very slim and not used for participation research. Under ever greater pressure of austerity, universities are forced to reduce their staff and concentrate on teaching. Research can only be undertaken with funding by third parties (mainly international donors), and is often conducted in support of structural adjustment policies and their implementation.

It is of great importance that trade union–university cooperation be institutionalised, to create a link between research on the one hand, and policy development, education and training on the other. Involving researchers in extension education and policy development, and trade union activists in university research, creates continuity. Continuous interaction allows the building of research agendas jointly proposed and implemented, a continuing feedback/outlet for extension courses and policy development. Trade union–university co-operation in Africa should lead to the creation of labour studies programmes in the universities and other higher level training programmes for trade union leaders and policy makers, as well as for other worker representatives. Furthermore, trade union–university co-operation can

be ensured in the long term if it becomes institutionalised as an integral part of the university structure. It is also important for trade unions to gain representation on university councils.

The experience in APADEP points at positive prospects in this respect. The intense co-operation between trade unionists and university researchers in conducting worker education, as well as in carrying out research projects, has had important spin-off effects. A few examples will show this. The University of Cape Coast in Ghana started, in co-operation with TUC (Ghana), a certificate and a diploma course for young and upcoming trade unionists, a programme that is by now well-established. Building on that, an international postgraduate labour policy certificate course started in 2004, and is now being extended for French-speaking countries to the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. In South Africa, the Durban Workers' College has for many years held worker participation schools, in co-operation with the University of Natal and the University of Western Cape. These schools are now internationalised to cover the Southern African region. The research results obtained through APADEP are used in these programmes. A number of other universities, in conjunction with trade unions in their country, are building up similar programmes in Nigeria, Tanzania, Guinea and Niger.

#### *Legal facilitation of democratic participation*

Whether the structure, functioning or support of democratic participation is at stake, law plays a pivotal role. Thus, in conclusion of this chapter on effective, meaningful and democratic worker participation, the legal dimension of the participation process should receive prominent emphasis. It has been often said that law is a secondary force in human affairs, not least in labour relations. Other factors, in particular economic and socio-political factors, are paramount. One of the major assumptions underlying the second wave of the African 'wind of change' towards sustainable democratic transformation and development is the need for the rule of law. Many proponents of democratic transformation in African now realise that the absence of a legal culture, a regime of rights and duties under law, was a major shortcoming in the first African quest for democracy and development. As in other areas of African endeavour, legal facilitation of participation would appear vital. Until recently, attempts at participation have been marked by the 'abstention of the law'. Where use of labour legislation was made, as in the second Zambian Republic and in Zimbabwe, it was typically an instrument to achieve trade union incorporation, intended to undermine trade union autonomy at the macro-economic and workplace levels. In fact, the use of the law in that respect was no less than a continuation of colonial practice, with regulation and control being the foremost aims of labour legislation. No systematic legal support was offered by labour legislation to advance aspirations of real participation in the workplace. The challenge is clear: this research suggests that in order for participation to succeed, effective legal basis and support is indispensable.



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## Chapter 12

# Building a Trade Union Agenda

This chapter examines how the research results can be ‘translated’ into possible implications for trade union policy. In a way this is a hazardous undertaking, as trade union policy is not for researchers to make. *Policy making* then is not the intention of this chapter, but *contribution to policy making* is, captured in the chapter title ‘Building a trade union agenda’. Some normative tones and notes are bound to appear in what follows, but the trade unionist will understand that words like ‘should’ or ‘must’ coming from researchers are only suggestions, fully recognising that only a trade union policy democratically drawn up by the trade union itself is legitimate. This chapter will come in two main parts. First, a review will be made of the policy conclusions as these were identified in each of the countries where major APADEP research was conducted. Building on that experience, elements of a more generalised trade agenda will be proposed.

### **Building on Experience**

This section will report on what the grassroots trade union representatives expect from trade union policy, and/or how this is interpreted by the researchers. This will be done country by country. The review of policy considerations per country will clearly show different emphases and that is to be expected: each country has its own trade union and labour relations history as well as socio-political context. In the headings for each country in the section to follow, the major concerns (as suggested by the research results) are sketched.

#### *Tanzania: strengthening democratic participation through independent trade unions*

When the questionnaire respondents were asked what they found the most desirable trade union policy, the most frequent answer on how to solve their major problems was ‘creating more participation in decision making’ (39 per cent, according to Chambua 2002, 177). Thirteen per cent were of the view that the best policy is an adversarial one, ‘making demands totally independent of management’, and the remaining respondents opted for a combination of adversarial and participatory policy. This shows that the respondents still had a lot of faith in participation in spite of its limitations of which they were otherwise very much aware. Questionnaire respondents as well as union leaders interviewed all wanted participation to be extended to the private sector as well and also wanted enactment of a law to give worker participation legal protection. ‘What the respondents fear is that unless

participation is extended to the private sector and given legal authority there is every danger that it is going to die, given the increasing dominance of the private sector' (*ibid.*, 186).

Workers and unions also felt they had a lot to offer (ideas and otherwise) for the development of their country. Chambua lists a number of trade union proposals that were made on labour laws, economic policies and welfare institutions (*ibid.*, 113), and lists actual successes scored, such as establishing minimum wages for government employees, creating women's committees at workplaces, access to information on factory inspection reports, etc. (*ibid.*, 130–1). Trade union representatives were well aware of the problems facing them and were prepared to help in finding solutions. They have faith in participation, in democracy. This means, continues Chambua, that participation beyond the workplace has to be developed, involving labour in considering, planning and implementing development programmes. 'Without the participation, and hence the support of the people, any development programme is bound to fail' (*ibid.*, 191).

An important condition for the development of democratic participation, concludes Chambua, is an independent trade union. And 'in order to have free and autonomous trade unions, the law of a country should allow for the freedom of association and the unions to engage in defence of workers' interests without fear of intimidation, or fear of legal and/or political reprisals' (*ibid.*, 188). The restructuring of the party-controlled trade union to an independent and democratic one took a full decade (*ibid.*, 21–40) but was not fully completed at the time of writing. The 1998 Trade Union Act, which became effective from 2000 onwards, provides freedom of association but 'even so the government, through the Registrar of Trade Unions and the Minister of Labour, still have a lot of control over the unions' so that the trade union movement is not yet at the end of the road in its struggle for full freedom and autonomy (*ibid.*, 188).

Furthermore, the developments brought about by globalisation politically imply a tremendous shift of power away from popularly elected representatives to owners of international capital. It seems that the only power that is capable of challenging the players in the capital markets is the organised strength of the people in their free and autonomous organisations, especially in trade unions. Thus, we need to have strong unions with committed, enlightened and competent leadership capable of defending and promoting both the interests of the workers and of their respective countries. In this task, unity among all stakeholders: unions, intellectuals and other civil society organisations is absolutely vital (Chambua 2002, 192).

Chambua concludes that the principal trade union task is to canvass for democratic participation. Since all the political parties including the government are in favour of democracy, it is the trade union movement which should convince the political arena of the link between democracy and democratic participation (*ibid.*, 189).

*Mali: towards a trade union vision linking democracy, participation and socio-economic development*

The respondents in the Mali survey mentioned the following major items for future trade union policy: education and training (68 per cent), independent negotiation (49 per cent), participation (24 per cent) and mutual companies and funds (16 per cent). Worker education stands out as priority number one and is seen as a trade union task. The respondents also specify what kind of education they want: on trade unionism (81 per cent), labour legislation (49 per cent), participation (35 per cent) and various other subjects (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 93–4). The respondents put independent negotiation before participation, according to the Mali researchers, as they understand that participation rights can only be obtained through trade union struggle, and that an adversarial approach must be maintained as a support basis for effective participation (*ibid.*, 96). If the trade union proves to effectively defend the interests of the workers, the number of trade union members must be expected to grow. In order to develop participation, the trade union must build up bargaining power: participation is not going to be offered gracefully by capital owners. It is only obtained through struggle (*ibid.*, 98).

The lack of education and vocational training were mentioned by the survey respondents in Mali as the top problem of the workers in general, next to social mobility, industrialisation and rural development. To meet these challenges a common front before private employers and government must be made and this requires trade union unity. Without such unity it will be difficult to have an impact on labour legislation, on generating a genuine trade union culture, on increasing participation of women and youth in the union, and on the integration of the informal sector in the formal (*ibid.*, 92–3).<sup>1</sup> The preoccupations of workers have to be taken into account at the level of the workplace and beyond, including in labour legislation. This can only be done effectively if representatives of workers can participate. It is the trade union movement that must take the initiative and define the global aim and objectives it wants to set for such new labour relations. The trade union should have a clear and well defined social policy vision linking participation and development, participation and democracy and participation and productivity (*ibid.*, 97). Interpreting the research results in Mali, the authors conclude that trade union renewal should have the following main objectives: reinstate and consolidate trade union unity, broaden the trade union to include all workers, reinforce trade union university co-operation and with other NGOs, develop gender perspectives, generate sustainable funding for participation and institutionalise participation (*ibid.*, 98).

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1 The researchers assume that the latter point of view may be controversial, but maintain that the economic development of a country cannot rest on the shoulders of marginalised groups; the modern sector must be developed and eventually absorb the informal economy. Throughout this process the trade union should, of course, say the authors, defend the interests of workers in the informal sector (Coulibaly et al. 2000, 92–3).

*Zimbabwe: active trade union support to workers' committees and works councils is likely to produce a stronger trade union presence at the workplace*

In his concluding overview of the place and role of the Zimbabwe trade union movement after independence, Schiphorst traces strengths and weaknesses and comes to the following conclusions (Schiphorst 2001, 347–63). The trade unions underwent a major shift from a 'clientalist' to a more professionally run organisation, passing through a period of organisational disorder and corruption. In the 1990s the new leadership in the ZCTU federation (Morgan Tsvangirai) and in a number of sector unions resulted in greater internal democracy by diminishing the influence of ZANU (PF), rejuvenating leadership, improving relations between federation and affiliated sectoral unions, decentralising the union structure with regional offices, and opening up for debate with the general public (*ibid.*, 350–1). Eventually, a long protracted fight took place in which ZANU (PF) tried to regain its influence over ZCTU, but ZCTU became more and more the voice of the opposition and became an actor on the political scene, but was always careful not to become or act like a political party. Instead, it remained open for dialogue and debate, whilst stressing its independence vis-à-vis any political party (*ibid.*, 352). The upshot is that ZCTU has now become an independent autonomous trade union.

The trade unions were never seriously involved in any (major) decisions regarding labour policy. They were consulted on proposed changes in labour legislation whenever these occurred, but these were 'cosmetic consultations', for public relations purposes and did not constitute genuine involvement in decision making (*ibid.*, 349–50). Its eventual independent and autonomous status made the trade union a legitimate partner to voice the opinion of workers at national level consultations, and through such a process could strengthen a democratic culture in civil society. Despite its new status ZCTU was not allowed access to national consultation frameworks, and it was too weak (a unionisation degree of less than 25 per cent in the formal sector) and financially deprived to impose its participation. This also made it relatively easy for ZANU (PF) to ignore ZCTU's 1995 alternative proposal to the government structural adjustment policy (*ibid.*, 357).

Nevertheless, the union had managed to free itself from party control, gain legitimacy in the eyes of the workers and build bridges to civic society (*ibid.*, 362). The trade union also wanted to strengthen its presence on the shop floor, with differing degrees of success. The fear expressed, that the trade union presence at the workplaces would be weakened as workers' committees and works councils might erode the trade union, was not valid. To the contrary, the links between union and councils appeared beneficial to both, and strengthened representation of worker interests, despite occasional trade union distrust. Schiphorst concludes:

It was obvious that trade unions, rather than giving the workers' committees the cold shoulder, could have reaped more from the potential this elected body of worker representatives at the shop floor offered. As we have seen, in all cases, the workers' committee became the focal point of the workers' voice on the shop floor, sometimes inarticulate, sometimes not well-trained, but always sincere and serious. As such, and our cases would suggest this, they could well provide the serving-hatch between workers and

the trade unions, facilitating a two-way flow of communication between these two entities. However, this would require a more active trade union policy towards company-based representation, a policy which goes beyond the mere replacement of workers' committees by union appointees as was the ZCTU policy line until 1992 (*ibid.*, 361).

A strong trade union presence at the enterprise is still a major challenge. Its involvement in collective bargaining mainly occurs at national level on the National Employment Council where wages and working conditions are negotiated between industry and organised sector, followed up at sector level but hardly ever at enterprise level. And at that level, the only form of democratically elected worker representation is not actively supported by the trade unions.

*Ghana: trade union education is a sine qua non condition for both successful collective bargaining and effective democratic participation*

The Ghana publication reports extensively on the expectations the union representatives have of their trade unions, and what policy they would advise (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 59–81). The information collected referred to both the expectations of respondents' local unions and of the leaders of the national trade union federation, Ghana TUC.

What do the respondents from the *local and workplace unions* want to do? The most frequent answer (34 per cent) was education and training for their members (*ibid.*, 75). Further, a plethora of other desiderata were written down in answer to open-ended questions, a long list indeed: proper trade union organisation, effective communication and contact with the grassroots, promotion of worker social welfare, improvement of collective bargaining, better worker/management relations, championing of workers' views and promotion of greater worker participation, creation of jobs, provision of crèches, housing schemes for workers, counselling services, organisation of women, membership drives, solidarity building, institution of strike funds, improvement of the standard of the Labour College, promotion of research, care for the retired and recreation activities (*ibid.*, 76). When listing what they wanted the higher trade union echelons and the federation to do, the respondents repeated more or less the same list and education and training continued to stand out by far as priority number one. A special wish, addressed to the federation, was that a considerable number of the respondents (10 per cent) wanted the TUC to engage in productive ventures, thus creating job opportunities and assuring trade union funds.

But indeed the need for education dominated the respondents' expectations and this shows, the researchers say, that the worker representatives themselves had identified lack of training and education as very crucial for trade union development, strength and power. The respondents wanted education to be provided first and foremost by the trade union (*ibid.*, 74). Subjects for education suggested in order of frequency and priority were: history of the trade union, collective bargaining procedures, labour laws, ILO conventions, worker participation, industrial relations, grievance handling, health and safety, trade union constitution and basic rights, leadership roles, the political economy of Ghana, finance, productivity, human

relations, family life, organisational skills, gender issues, effective communication, conduct and discipline at work and social security (*ibid.*, 74–5).

Otherwise, the respondents found that trade unions should ‘begin at home’ when it comes to improving their condition. They want the union to diversify sources for funding and it is suggested that more information sharing between the elected officers and the grassroots will already be of great help to make the unions function better. They want greater democracy within the unions as well as transparency and probity in leadership (*ibid.*, 79). One is aware that reference to moral encouragement, solidarity and fraternity, noble as these principles are, is not sufficient. Trade union cohesion and unity of purpose as well as unity of action are essential pre-requisites for trade union strength and influence. Factionalism and splintering are not in the interest of the unions nor in the interest of civil society and democracy at large (Agbesinyale 2000a, 135). A special challenge for the trade union movement is the gender issue. In her conclusions on the research conducted in Ghana, Akua Britwum comments that the offices that females held in their unions tended to conform to the traditional qualities that women are perceived to have in society (see Chapter 10 in this book). The Women’s Desk activities tend to divert into areas that reinforce women’s traditional roles; very little attention is paid to examining the structure and character of trade unions in Ghana and the ways in which they tend to promote male dominance in their activities (Britwum 2000a, 121).

With reference to the many problems facing them outside their places of work, the majority of the respondents emphasised the need for intense national government intervention in mitigating many of these problems, with trade union participation.

Greater worker participation in decision making beyond the workplace, such as direct worker representation and participation on the district assemblies and other policy-making bodies, are important avenues by which workers can contribute towards the development of their areas and districts. Workers’ active participation in development decision making is important if development must actually benefit the mass of the people. The democratisation of development and of development decision making demands that all stakeholders, including workers, are actively engaged in the process. This is part of the reason why workers’ participation beyond the horizons of the enterprise is important, so that workers’ working and living conditions within and beyond the enterprise can receive appreciable improvement (Adu-Amankwah and Agbesinyale 2000, 81).

At the workplace, collective bargaining can be an effective weapon for labour, provided it is properly backed by research, education and training of skilled negotiators (Agbesinyale 2000a, 126). Previously both management and workers were state employees in the public sector. The new managements of private enterprises are shutting the door on worker participation, compelling workers and unions to content themselves with collective bargaining only. The forms of participation as they exist now only represent a kind of goodwill gesture from management and owners of capital, granted in order to achieve a measure of industrial stability and tranquillity at the workplace. No concrete legal basis or framework exists for its pursuit (*ibid.*, 138). The trade union movement must press for participation, and this should lead to empowerment of workers. Organised labour must demonstrate the value of participation visibly to all, especially government and employers (*ibid.*, 132).

*Guinea: create order in the trade union house and make a constructive contribution to the development of the country: the workers are the main artisans of that development*

The Guinea researchers distinguish three principal phases in the development of the trade union movement in the country. First was the colonial time, when essentially the trade unions were opposed to the colonial administration and fought for independence. Next, after a brief spell of trade union autonomy when political independence was obtained, trade unions were subordinated and subsequently incorporated in the one-party state. The third phase is one of crisis in many respects: the trade union movement lost its unity, precisely at a time 'when structural adjustment hit the working class catastrophically' (Diallo et al. 1992, 97).

Putting the different research results of the first survey (1986–90) together, the researchers come to the conclusion that two dimensions of problems, and therefore two approaches of trade union policy, go hand in hand. The material conditions of work and work contract are bad and have to be improved. But the trade union should also realise that the interests of the workers are linked to the interests of the country. As was reported in Chapter 5, the workers have many side activities to make ends meet, and are (as wage earners) responsible for part of the monetary income of the household to which they belong. But they are also part of the survival game of their household, in which they take part themselves, and thus want to engage in a battle to improve the general conditions of their prefecture, their province, in respect of agriculture, communications, provision of water and electricity, development of industry, building of hospitals, etc. They expect the trade union to also address these problems, and are prepared to see that their own sectional interests have to be viewed in the perspective of wider social interests. The researchers resent the lack of regional and national level consultation and believe this omission is one of the principal reasons of the failure of many development plans: through their unions, workers can contribute to development, because the workers are its artisans (*ibid.*, 107–8).

The respondents to the more recent Guinea questionnaire survey (1998–2002) were very apprehensive of the actual trade union situation in the country, and their major preoccupation was to reinforce the trade union movement itself. Like in the other country studies, important clues suggested include more education, a better flow of information between leaders and constituency, followed by the assurance of better financial resources to increase trade union membership, adequate functioning of trade union structures (regular meetings, improve transport facilities), adherence to proper election procedures and procedures of recall or other procedures of control by the constituency, the introduction and implementation of a system of trade union dues, and an information and education drive to ensure the trade union representatives know the labour legislation in the country. Under trade union plurality as it exists in Guinea, it is essential that unity of action is strengthened so that the defence of worker interests is not compromised and a real contribution can be made to the consolidation of democracy and economic development of the country (Dopavogui et al. 2003, 82–98). On the policies to be adopted by the trade union, opinions were divided between those who wanted participation and social dialogue first of all (43



per cent) and those who opted for adversarial labour relations (10 per cent opted for unilateral protest and claims, and 16 per cent found that resorting to strike action was the best way the union could adopt to solve their problems). The remaining 31 per cent made suggestions in all sorts of directions, among others to set up mutual companies and systems (*ibid.*, 73–4).

*Cape Verde: the difficult road to bargaining and participation by a maturing trade union*

The Cape Verde researchers point out that youth is a major characteristic of Cape Verde's trade unionism. The UNTC-CS has only operated as an independent organisation since the early 1990s. And its youthful nature explains the still weak degree of unionisation and the long list of problems yet to be resolved by the movement. The trade union has not yet been able to unionise the more highly skilled and educated employees. Yet it has to raise the level of competence of its union membership in order to be able to find adequate proposals or solutions to the challenge of effective worker representation. Employment stability should be a priority subject for a long-term labour policy which, however, should start to bear fruit in the short term. The employment contracts are a matter of great concern, as a substantive number of workers do not have one, and the trade union representatives do not know the relevant labour legislation. Conditions of work are gradually improving, but remuneration for work is not, in particular when compared to the much more generous salaries (plus complementary extras) received by managers and employers. These concerns must be put in the context of ongoing privatisation which, much to the workers' dislike, transfers property to private persons, thus taking it out of the context of public control related to national interests (Reis and Rodrigues 2003, 66–7).

The questionnaire respondents appear to be overwhelmingly in favour of participation as the desired trade union policy. Not less than 87 per cent opine that the trade union policy should be one where the union takes part in decision making and assumes co-responsibility for these decisions (another 7 per cent also believe participation is the best policy, but without taking responsibility for decisions), and 3 per cent believes adversarialism is the best trade union policy (*ibid.*, 62). As in other countries, the questionnaire respondents in Cape Verde want their trade union primarily to be active in education and training.

*South Africa: at the cross roads of adversarialism, national concertation<sup>2</sup> and workplace participation*

As in the South Africa APADEP research project, no questionnaires were administered among trade union representatives (see Chapter 4), so no reference can be made to opinions of worker representatives in the same way as for the other countries. But a good amount of research-based literature has been written about South African trade unionism and labour relations, to which brief reference will be made here. With

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2 See footnote 4 in Chapter 9.

respect to democratic worker participation, trade union policy has followed two main lines. The first is an active participation policy at national level, as in particular evidenced by the flourishing practice of the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). This may also be due to the fact that COSATU, the strongest trade union federation, is generally on good terms and intimately linked with the ruling party ANC. This appears to give returns, but it should also be noted that there has been growing tension among the ‘alliance’ partners ANC, COSATU and SACP about socio-economic policy as well as about their respective positions on Zimbabwe.

Worker participation at the workplace is clearly not on the trade union priority agenda. Upon the launching of a new Industrial Relations Act in 1995 a long debate was held in the country on whether or not to accept the workplace forums, and the trade unions decided not to support them. The unions had by law the key to their establishment, through the famous ‘trade union trigger’ clause. Thus the forums did not get a chance to prove (or disprove) themselves (see also Chapter 7 in this book). If one takes the lively debates in the South African Labour Bulletin (SALB) as a guide, the trade union feared its power would be reduced by workplace participation, as two different channels of influence would be created, which would either duplicate efforts or give the employer the possibility of playing one system out against the other. The trade union fears with respect to participation may have been further fuelled by the fact that many trade unions, suffering from a lack of capacity and resources, experience difficulty in ‘controlling’ their own structures (like shop stewards’ councils) at workplace level, and sometimes find themselves in conflict situations arising out of their inability to provide adequate service and leadership to their members at that level.<sup>3</sup>

It may also be that the resistance against workplace participation finds its source in a long-term trade union strategy. COSATU and perhaps more trade union streams are not so much enchanted by neo-liberal ‘third ways’ or by ‘rainbow’ scenarios. Adversarialism at the workplace may be considered necessary to keep the understrata alert and combative, to eventually run the economy in favour of or even by the workers. Any compromise with the (white) owners and their managers is considered counterproductive to a more fundamental change in labour relations.

*Burkina Faso: of phantom trade unions, and of trade union leaders suffering from ‘per diem-itis’*

The Burkina Faso researchers brought out three subsequent policy reports on the basis of their analysis of the research data.<sup>4</sup> The first report is very provocative. The researchers conclude that several trade union federations in Burkina Faso are ‘nothing but a shadow of themselves’: it is not uncommon to see a trade union created by some dissatisfied persons with only family and friends as members; or to

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3 The much-publicised dispute between NUMSA and its shop stewards at Volkswagen is the best known example of this; see *Xinwa & others v Volkswagen of South Africa (Pty) Ltd*, 5 BLLR 409 (CC), 2003.

4 PADEP (2000); PADEP (2001); Kaboré (ed.) (2006).

see defeated candidates for a high trade union post create their own union in revenge (PADEP 2000, 7). The *Atlas Syndical Burkinabé* [Trade Union Atlas] (an inventory in all districts of the country to verify claimed membership figures) showed that several trade union federations did not have any constituency in most of the districts, in contradiction to their own claims: in other words, they are phantom unions (Diasso et al. 1998a). In many trade unions there is no internal democracy and no transparent management of union affairs, and donor money disappears regularly. Study fellowships made available to trade unions are given to friends and family, who may be invited to per diem-yielding seminars. There are many other scandals affecting the image of the trade union movement. A number of trade union leaders do only take part in seminars or conferences if they receive a per diem allowance. Trade union leaders 'suffering from per diem-itis' is an ever-recurrent researchers' comment. Trade union statutes, rules and regulations are often ignored or violated, and a small nucleus of persons run the union as they deem fit and to their personal advantage, without relating to the members (if there are any). One trade union federation, the USTB, is reported not to have had a Congress for 17 years. Leaders stay in their leadership function indefinitely, arguing that younger candidates do not yet have enough experience and, indeed, some of the federations are led by persons well into their pension years. The researchers conclude that the two most important steps to improve the situation are: informing the workers and the general public; and education and training of the existing rank-and-file trade union members as well as the workers (PADEP 2000).

In terms of trade union policy the researchers, using the basis of the case studies, qualitative interviews with trade union officials, and key informants in the labour relations world (including intellectuals and government officials), believe that priority number one is to get a labour grip on privatisation and all its consequences for workers. There are a number of claims, with respect to employment contract protection, salary, compensation in case of dismissal, etc., and these matters have to be sorted out in negotiations between trade unions and employers. In addition, there must be an involvement of representatives of workers in the management and policy of private companies, in particular requiring information on the state of the firm, and participation in the decisions of the enterprise that affect the interests of workers (*ibid.*, 11–16). Such policies, the researchers go on to say, can only be pursued if trade unions put their own house in order and find effective ways of unity in trade union action, creating a solid framework of co-operation between the different federations (*ibid.*).

In the second report a number of proposals were formulated by the researchers (PADEP 2001, 35–44), which may be summarised as follows. They make an appeal to the trade unions to be the vanguard of civil society, as they are the only organisations who can represent the interests of the workers. But the trade unions have to be credible and understand that 'a corrupted trade unionist is a finished and humiliated trade unionist' (*ibid.*, 36). Thus, democratic control from below is necessary. Elections at enterprise level should be encouraged in such a way that the entire workforce can elect the *délégués du personnel* [workplace representatives] they want, irrespective of trade union affiliation or preference. These elected people can represent the workers in participatory structures at workplace level.

In a final report (Kaboré 2006), the researchers repeat the above conclusions and do not mince their words. They say many trade union representatives and leaders are betraying the trust invested in them. Also, at the workplace many worker representatives are corrupted by management. If they subscribe to management policy they can be assured of privileges and benefits. If not, they will be morally harassed (*ibid.*, 4–8). The researchers conclude that the trade unions in Burkina Faso have to become democratically controlled again and seek unity of action. The main instrument is durable education and training at all levels of the movement, but in the first place for the leadership. Once reorganised and ‘remoralised’, the unions should adopt a policy of participation, at workplace as well as national level, making proposals which are in the interest of workers, union members and non-members alike, and defend these proposals (*ibid.*, 44–56).

### **Major Elements of a Trade Union Agenda**

Until now this chapter has looked into the specific contexts of trade union policy in the countries where APADEP research was conducted. These specific concerns will now be put together and moulded into a more generalised African trade union policy agenda.

#### *Beginning at home: internal democracy within trade union structures*

Trade unions can enable their members to learn the ways of democracy through their own democratic operations, and ultimately contribute to the development of a democratic culture of societal proportions. The survey results presented in Chapter 6 have shown that internal democracy within the trade union structures leaves much to be desired. Unions will themselves have to demonstrate good practice in such areas as democratic culture, good governance and democratic accountability if they wish to play a major role in consolidating African democratisation. Transparent management and good communications between grassroots representatives and workers (and between grassroots representatives and regional and national leaders) are both major ingredients of democracy and key battle zones for the trade union movement. To achieve this, trade unions will have to pay greater attention to internal democracy within their ranks. The mode of election to trade union offices could be by secret ballot and not by raising of hands or acclamation. Trade unions could further ensure a wider circulation of trade union statutes and policies as well as labour laws to their activists and general membership. They could also endeavour to provide resources, however limited, for the efficient running of the local and workplace trade union offices. Internal communication and consultation between different structures of the trade union could be much improved. Membership participation in trade union activities could be encouraged, and needs to be supported by appropriate and relevant training of trade union members so that they are aware and have the capability to request their leaders to account to them.

### *Education*

Education presents an investment for a trade union which is on the offensive and well adapted to the changes the society is undergoing. Solutions to tomorrow's problems will depend above all on whether worker education is accepted as a central part of the trade union fight. To ensure that the union movement fulfils the needs of a democratic and pluralist society, worker education needs to be innovative, allowing timely revision of the subjects it tackles. The advantage that trade unionism has is that it covers a very wide domain. Social, economic and political realities intermingle in the trade union movement and sometimes provoke healthy friction. Workers, especially those whose access to the union is more difficult – such as women and young people – want to see a better-structured and more open organisation. They yearn for a change in society so that democratic values meet the most immediate and pressing needs. Democracy from below is the driving force and, with the help of education and training, the elected worker and trade union representatives can become true *agents of democracy*.

Trade union education is vibrantly developing in Africa and has become the most important trade union activity. Very positive trends are visible: there is a shift from a 'hit and run' to a more programmatic approach. There is also a shift from an almost exclusive activity in capital cities and more urbanised/industrialising areas to a more even spread all over a particular country. Especially in the more recent years efforts are made to make education accessible to larger numbers of trade unionists, through the study circle method, trade union schools and worker colleges. Also, the frontiers of trade union education are pushed to the tertiary level in diploma and certificate courses, and these are now quickly growing and are indispensable for the professionalisation of trade union leadership.

### *Balanced representation*

In her chapter in Sverke's *The Future of Trade Unionism*, Jennifer Curtin argues that, while accountability is an important facet of representative democracy, particular needs of specific groups of workers – women and youth – cannot be ignored. 'Accepting, acknowledging and providing voice for different groups of workers within trade unions becomes increasingly necessary if unions want to continue to be viewed by government and employers as representatives of "the workers' class"' (Curtin 1997, 207–8). Special attention should be given to the problem of women's under-representation in trade union structures, which is rooted in structural, cultural and traditional factors, as Chapter 10 has profoundly demonstrated. Education, training and organisational initiatives are needed. In pursuing education and training more attention can be given to gender sensitisation among all trade union members, both women and men. Information needs to be disseminated on women workers' rights. Special effort should also be devoted to training women activists to improve their capacity to adequately represent the particular needs of women in collective bargaining and other means of workers' participation.

Curtin takes care to mention *women* as well as *youth* in one breath, a matter often overlooked in the 'under-representation debate'. The absence of young people in

union representation is as serious as that of women, but has been a less fashionable subject. There has been more feminist than juvenile agitation. But it is alarming that only about one in every ten union representatives is younger than 30 (see Chapter 6) when over 60 per cent of the population is over that age. Says Agbesinyale,

... the youth hardly finds representation or participation on trade union structures and bodies at various levels. The inclusion of the youth in trade union affairs should be seen as ensuring a long term benefit of replenishing and renewing the unions with a view to keeping them as vibrant as possible (Agbesinyale 2000a, 126).

### *Investment in trade union resources*

Education and training, as well as adequate infrastructure (organisational, administrative, etc., provisions) are not only necessary but also costly. One cannot expect African trade unions to foot that bill. In most countries, membership contributions are not enough to ensure that unions function properly. Unions can hardly pay for the cost of their premises, telephone bills, electricity, transport and so on. Check-off arrangements are no longer automatic in many places, and a lot of direct or indirect state/party subsidy has been discontinued. Moreover, mass dismissals in the formal sector have resulted in reduction in membership and thus in trade union income. Campaigns are now under way in many countries to mobilise members to pay their dues, and to enlist new membership in sectors neglected until recently (small firms, informal sector, new service sectors). This will increase resources but not enough to finance all the necessary activities. The opposite is more likely to be the case. To the extent that trade unions get new members in new sectors, they have to develop activities for them also, which will require new forms of organisation and orientation. Such activities need additional resources.

International trade union co-operation has been invaluable in making the African trade union movement cope with the volatile transition it is going through. Such support has assisted African trade unions in their reorganisation, in obtaining minimal levels of infrastructure and, above all, in setting up or reinforcing trade union education systems, a task to which the ILO has also contributed very considerably. But trade unions cannot carry on dancing to the donors' tune for ever.<sup>5</sup> Many years of international co-operation have, consequently, not yielded a sufficient base to the African trade unions to meet the many challenges before them. And what if donor co-operation dwindles or disappears? Nimako has called the dependence on international subsidy 'the democratisation of dependence' (Nimako 2002). Part of what has now become popularly known as civil society, including individual journalists, academics and the leadership of trade unions, he argues, has become dependent on external or donor NGOs (referred to officially as 'partnership') for finance and subsistence. Many of them, including trade unionists, support themselves through the policy of per diems (*ibid.*, 373).

The question of a firm sustainable financial basis for the future tasks of the trade unions is a formidable challenge. In particular, the effective and meaningful

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5 For a more extensive overview of the possible positive and negative effects of donor financing, see Kester and Sidibé 1997, 104–7.

participation of workers and trade unions in the development of the continent, of their countries and their places of work, requires investments which go far beyond funds available at present. Democracy is praised but not budgeted for. Several avenues may be explored for the financing of democratic worker participation. One of them is that the enterprise should foot the democracy bill. It is a fact that in industrialised Europe, where democratic worker participation has a long history and has come to stay, participation could never have functioned without financial support of the enterprise. In a number of European countries, most costs of training and education, of infrastructure, of expert advice and of working time spent on participation, are borne by the enterprise. The underlying idea is that both capital and labour are partners in production and that, just as much as management development is part of the company budget, the development of labour should also be. In other words, the financial support to participation is there *as of right* and not as a privilege and even less as a subsidy. Obtaining financial support as of right prevents dependence on or manipulation by the employer.

#### *Strengthening collective bargaining and workplace negotiation*

At levels beyond the enterprise this membership representation may be pursued by taking part in bipartite negotiations at sectoral level, or in tripartite negotiations or consultations; for instance, for the establishment of a minimum wage or on income and price policies, etc. These institutions normally pertain primarily to workers with a more or less regular employment contract in the formal sector. The trade unions have little choice but to strengthen and develop their capacity for collective bargaining and workplace negotiation. This will consolidate and expand the organisation of their traditional constituency of formal workers and the gains of the first generation of rights that allows for the collective negotiation of the terms and conditions of employment by workers. The fulfilment of this challenge is demanding. The poor resources of most trade unions and the weak workers' position on the labour market make the struggle difficult. In countries where trade unions were more recently divorced from party and state, the same and more difficulties are likely to be encountered: the unions have to regain the confidence of the workers and may only do so by obtaining tangible results. Reliable research support, education and training of skilled negotiators, effective communication and consultation with trade union members, mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of labour standards and the functioning of inspectorate institutions, legitimate and effective procedures for grievance handling and dispute settlement, the establishment of strike funds – all these are essential conditions that the trade unions must fulfil to make collective bargaining and its related procedures meaningful for protecting and advancing the interests of their members.

#### *Promoting workplace participation*

The yearning for workplace participation demonstrated by the grassroots worker and trade union representatives and activists reinforces the need for the trade unions to adopt this additional policy option. The trade unions can contribute to the wider

representation of workers' interests and their participation in decisions affecting them by promoting and supporting direct and indirect participation by workers at the workplace in addition to collective bargaining. Promoting workers participation then means consciously seeking to extend workers' influence in decision making beyond the sphere of the employment contract and the terms and conditions of work. The challenge of this policy option is that trade unions, whilst continuing to develop collective bargaining, also play an active and leading role in the development of the different forms of participation at the place of work.

### *The informal sector*

The trade union agenda is much larger than its role in the workplace in the formal sector. The picture of growing unemployment in the formal sector that is portrayed in the research points at the presence of many 'forgotten' partners in the workforce community – workers in the informal sector. The case for trade union organisation of informal sector workers is compelling and requires a creative approach. It cannot be simply premised on integrating their workers into the existing structures of the trade union movement. Work in this sector needs to be informed by an appreciation of the difference between it and the formal sector which has been the traditional domain for trade unions. The second phase of APADEP's research programme, as mentioned in Chapter 1, concentrates on this theme and the first country publications are appearing (for example, Britwum et al. 2006). It is beyond the scope of this book to elaborate this theme here.

### *Social dialogue and concertation*

Trade union representation of workers in both the informal and formal sectors takes place in participation in decision making 'beyond the enterprise': at district, regional, and in particular at national level, where labour policy is formulated and implemented and where negotiations on wages, income policy and employment policy are conducted. It offers the opportunity to trade unions to express solidarity with groups of workers in the informal sector to which they are indirectly related. As was reported in Chapter 5, many trade union representatives live in rural areas and are members of households of peasant farmers, unqualified or poorly qualified workers, raisers of livestock, or are unemployed. They are thus aware of the problems facing these people. Many have themselves one foot in the informal sector and have connections with operators in that sector and thus are interested in seeing their unions sitting on decision-making bodies that can influence conditions of all workers, typical and atypical. With respect to the formal sector it is of paramount importance that organised labour gets involved in the law-making process, also in order to increase effective negotiation and worker participation in workplace and macro-economic decision making.

In several African countries, structures of democratic participation beyond the workplace exist today. They include Economic, Social and Cultural Councils, as in Mali and other francophone African countries, and the National Economic Development and Labour Council of South Africa (NEDLAC). NEDLAC is often



considered a spearhead 'model' that could inspire other African countries, not only in terms of its co-determination right on a number of broad societal issues, but also in terms of the trade unions' role in influencing labour legislation. It is the latter perspective that is badly missing in most countries: new labour laws are mostly the result of a pact of government with employers rather than with trade unions. Yet several authors have pointed at the dangers of neo-liberal corporatism or co-optation. Governments may use national consultation to facilitate their own efforts to contain the militancy of their countries' labour movements by granting the union leaders some stake in decision-making processes of the national economy in return for their acceptance of privatisation and neo-liberalism (Catchpole and Cooper 2003, 23), and, as a result, working-class militancy may easily be seen as disruptive (Bramble and Barchiesi 2003, 4–6). Over the past years the International Labour Organisation has put a lot of energy in the development of 'social dialogue' as an instrument to achieve consensus between employers, government and trade unions, and possibly other representative groups. However, the ILO consensus approach implies the danger of confirming the status quo. Instead of dialogue, *concertation* leading to social pacts is advocated (Baskin, 2000). But successful concertation depends on strong union organisations that can participate in making pacts and in reaching and enforcing agreements with capital and state (Adler and Webster 2000, 3).

## **Conclusion**

From the above long listing of agenda elements it should be clear that workplace democracy is not the only trade union preoccupation. This is fully realised. Can trade unions engage in so many battles; do they have the strength, the resources, the competence? The general conclusion of many studies is that trade unions, with the possible exception of South Africa, cannot be considered strong sparring partners in today's labour relations. And they are not gathering strength in a number of countries. 'It seems that many unions have for too long cashed in on the fame achieved during the battles of democratic transformation; while they used to be a voice of opposition, they slowly became part of the system and drifted away from their rank and file members' (van Stijn 2002, 350). The current trade union condition is cause for grave concern. Large numbers of workplace trade union representatives have no access to labour laws or to trade union statutes. Local trade union committees have few or no resources to carry out their functions no budget, office space, means of transport or other resources. There is also inadequate provision of trade union education, weakness of internal trade union democracy as well as marked under-representation of women and youth in trade union structures. Trade unions generally do not have a clear policy framework within which to carry out their duty of protecting and advancing the interests of their membership as well as contributing to the development of society as a whole.

## Chapter 13

# Trade Unions and Workplace Democracy in a Globalising Economy

This book has presented the results of a research project on workplace democracy, conducted over the past 20 years in a number of African countries, in particular in Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Perhaps the most striking phenomenon in the studies is that the workers and the grassroots union representatives and activists yearn for participation and democracy and keep doing so, against all odds and over a long period of time. Upon independence, they were mobilised to participate in their countries' development, with lofty political slogans. But participation, like so many post-independence initiatives, made a 'false start' (Dumont 1962): the worker representatives were manipulated and their trade unions were in many countries confiscated by the one-party state, as was described in Chapter 2. Under the following structural adjustment programmes governments were sidetracked by the Bretton Woods institutions, and when multi-party democracy was added to Africa's development agenda hopes soared among workers and their representatives that they were also going to have a greater voice in the running and policy of the workplaces where they were employed. A number of the case studies reported in Chapter 7 and 8 report these expectations, and the questionnaire survey results reported in Chapter 9 confirm a high and militant participation propensity. But no support was forthcoming. Neo-liberal globalisation of the economy implied the withdrawal of the state as an active partner in labour relations, and the trade unions appeared to be weary of defending participation which they associated with failed regimes of socialist signature. The only initiative came from the management and employer side, spurred by the successes of human resource techniques the world over. At the workplace, the worker representatives who had first been at the mercy of political intrigue and indoctrination were now handed over to the greed for increased productivity of their managers. In as much as workplace democracy still exists today in Africa, it is either a remnant of institutional arrangements introduced by one-party states (Tanzania and Zimbabwe – see Chapter 8), or a broad spectrum of more or less informal and casual procedures that may give workers a change to express opinion and suggestion but where management remains in full control (see Chapter 7). In a number of the countries studied, trade unions tried to enter into managerial and policy decision making through an extension of traditional negotiating procedures, but also with little effect. A lot of overlap, confusion and confrontation in worker representation through trade union structures or participation forums was caused by the fact that the trade unions had not developed a concept, a policy framework, let alone a 'vision' on participation that could be used as reference for their officers, their members and the workers in general.

The puzzling result of the studies conducted is the trade union deficit with respect to workplace democracy, in spite of the impetus for it at the grassroots level. The question of many of the researchers in the APADEP programme has been: why do the trade unions react as they do? The answer is complicated. Extensive attention was given in this work to the penury of the trade union movement in the transition from unitary party-controlled unions in a state-controlled economy to autonomous democratic unions in a globalised liberal economy. Problems of decreasing membership, diminishing income and material support, rising multi-unionism and so on have plagued the movement. But also a defensive attitude and the lack of response to new challenges and conditions have implied that the trade union movement has not been able to respond to the challenge of workplace democracy.

## **Globalisation and Democracy**

### *The return of the capital-controlled firm*

The book *Labour Relations and Development* describes globalisation as the transformation of national economies into one global economy, one global labour market and one financial market. And obviously, work and labour are centrally involved, as labour cost and labour productivity are key factors in economic development (Fernandez Jilberto and Riethof 2002). Globally mobile capital becomes a more and more powerful force, putting pressure on governments to reduce social spending, forcing down wage levels and adversely affecting labour conditions. Labour costs and not employment generation are central, and rationalisation of production leads to reductions in the workforce. States are no longer able to provide adequate protection for their citizens, including employment and social security (*ibid.*, 5–8). Deregulation of labour legislation leads to less job security, and subcontracting even more: the subcontractors pay no welfare contributions as the informal sector is not well-monitored, so that workers fall outside the protection of labour legislation (as was shown in the APADEP case studies of Guinea and Burkina Faso), and this leads to a fragmentation and segmentation of workers' interests and demands. Outsourcing and subcontracting lead to a fragmentation of tasks and usually to more precarious working conditions for the atypical worker, so that organised labour has to deal with an increasingly diversified labour market and thus increasingly heterogeneous categories of workers and atypical labour contracts (part-time, home work, 'project contracts', fixed contracts). The authors state that since the changes (including structural adjustment, state reform and trade regulation), levels of poverty, unemployment and real income have not improved (*ibid.*, 1–19).

Stress and ill-health, increasing employee–management distrust and lower worker commitment are the result, as was shown in the case studies reported in this book. These studies have illustrated a number of consequences of the globalising economy for labour in an almost dramatic way. The research highlights the severe problem of rising unemployment and the attendant insecurity for most workers. This is the result of the economic stagnation and decline arising from several factors, including the massive retrenchments of labour that have been carried out as a key feature of

structural adjustment and globalisation. The studies demonstrate the problem of low and insufficient incomes for workers and the high degree of dissatisfaction with that. The majority are very or entirely dissatisfied and are incapable of meeting their most basic needs. In most households, not enough money is available to buy clothes, educate children, have access to medical assistance, pay for water and electricity, buy food, pay rent or buy firewood. The research data also provide information on the poor and sometimes abominable working conditions and how unacceptable this is to workers. This covers poor hygiene, poor health and safety, lack of protection against hazardous jobs, absence of canteens and poor transportation facilities (even at times absence of drinking water), unsatisfactory grading and promotion, inadequate provision for training and education, as well as deficient workplace management that does not provide adequate machinery and equipment or proper maintenance for what is there. Working conditions often remain as bad as under previous public ownership; consultation gradually disappears in naked top-down hierarchies, creating workers who have no option but to accept averse conditions imposed on them, justified under arguments of international competitiveness, but with no recourse to any framework of consultation or protest, with or without trade union support (Chapters 5, 7 and 8).

In the case study descriptions of workplaces, these turn out to be a locus of exploitation and alienation, under sometimes despotic management. Strict hierarchical organisation leaves no room for workers to even express themselves, and they are split in protected 'core' workers, less protected 'periphery' workers and unprotected 'marginalised' workers, who may be subjected to 'downsizing', 'outsourcing' or 'out-placement', in order to keep the enterprise 'lean', 'just in time', 'competitive' and above all 'flexible'. Trade union response is often reactive, stopgap and disoriented, bravely trying to cure the symptoms of a global market economy, but only seldom consistently proactive.

In a recent worldwide review of the main trends in labour relations, Kaufman comes to the conclusion, among others, that 'labour cannot be treated as a commodity without serious repercussions' (Kaufman 2004, 630). Political systems that host greedy capitalism also become the arena of manipulation and exploitation. Such a 'warning', perhaps less outspoken, is also implied in Kaufman's review when he states that insecurity, growing inequality and sub-standard working conditions are likely to grow if free markets 'fail to give workers adequate voice and protection against arbitrary and discriminatory treatment' (*ibid.*, 631).

### *Democracy as the new ideology?*

After a century of battles between many ideologies, only one ideology seems to have survived: neo-liberal globalisation, promoting free movement of trade, deregulation of social affairs and weakening of the state. WTO, WB and IMF are the motors of this new ideology (van Stijn 2002, 337–8). Globalisation has become an 'ideological or a cultural given' (Gollan and Markey 2001, 327), and is 'legitimised' by democracy: a triumphant liberal laissez-faire democracy, exposing failed communism and socialism. Popular left-leaning governments are often the most effective implementers of neo-liberal policies (Baskin 2000, 45). The flexible

firm in the global market economy is supported by a neo-liberal ideology that seeks refuge under the general label of democracy.

The combination of democracy, neo-liberal perspectives, privatisation, globalisation and reduction of the role of the state created a radically different situation when compared to previous decades. A new philosophy of labour relations was introduced. The shift of public to private ownership is based on the claim that private entrepreneurship and initiative is more conducive to productive economic development. The next step is then quickly made: leave it to the private entrepreneurs and all will be all right. Private entrepreneurs also claim this. They were not in a very comfortable position during the heydays of state-controlled economies and expect that in the new climate they should no longer be hindered by any form of state control, by trade unions too close to the political forces, or by worker participation as a political gimmick. Employers and foreign investors demand a 'conducive investment climate'. The new private owners (often foreign investors and multinationals) have unfettered claims on exclusive management prerogatives after they have been lured into a particular country by governments seeking economic growth. Employers and management triumphantly point at the failure of past socialist and communist regimes to dismiss any kind of participation that smacks of power redistribution. Condemnation of previous unsuccessful regimes binds employers to governments. Many governments of all political complexions seem to have embraced the neo-classical economic agenda with enterprise flexibility of employment relations and strengthening managerial prerogative (Gollan and Markey 2001, 323). Managers run an enterprise as they please.

### *The democracy disillusionment*

The democratisation process that got under way in Africa in the final decade of the 20th century was badly needed. It has imbued people – employed and unemployed, men and women, young and old – with fresh vigour and has given them new hope to gain at least some control over their lives and their future. Trade unions have often played important and sometimes even decisive roles in the democratisation process (Kester and Sidibé 1997). When post-transition governments introduced economic reforms, expectations were high and social actors expected to be involved in the decision-making process. The process of political democratisation in the 1990s gave hope to many people of showing that they can themselves act to survive, make themselves heard and take part in decision making. But democracy remained limited to the polls, it was not applied to the world of work or to the economy. The hope of more democracy will only survive if the democratic landscape broadens to include people in the decisions that concern them. Democracy needs to be extended throughout society and embedded into social, cultural and economic life. It is of paramount importance to create democratic institutions which can express the interdependence of different groups in society. The less privileged groups need channels to express themselves, to exert influence, to share in the fruits of economic progress, and above all, to co-determine their future. But they became disillusioned with the result of democratisation and 'resent that economic reforms are generally presented as unavoidable and as the only rational way to proceed in times of crisis' (Fernandez

Jilberto and Riethof 2002, 5). The grassroot workers and worker representatives in many of the APADEP case studies often express bitter disappointment when they taste the price of privatisation which falls far below their expectations.

### *Participatory democracy*

Many African analysts have argued that participation should be a key player in the struggle for democracy. Only participation can ensure deep democracy, says Ake (1995), and Onimode (1992) points out that in addition to the restricted democratic rights that Africans are now beginning to enjoy, the question of citizenship rights related to economic democratisation also needs to be looked into (see also Anyang'Nyong'o 1987; Rasheed 1995; Newbury 1994). A recent random survey of public opinion in 12 sub-Saharan African countries and covering over 21,000 respondents comes to the following conclusion, among others. Multi-party political democracy is widely accepted but democracy is 'work in progress in which the requisite attitudes, actions and institutions have to take root' (Bratton et al. 2005, 345). The researchers conclude that democracy is felt by the respondents to deliver individual dignity, but the majority reject structural adjustment. They demand public intervention in the economy and find that the state must be armed with instruments that ensure that liberalisation and privatisation meet social objectives including, above all, opportunities for gainful employment (*ibid.*, 353). The study further concludes that:

... the conception of democracy described by our African interlocutors, while liberal – valuing, above all, freedom of speech – is also *participatory*. Perhaps reflecting cultural mores, the Africans we spoke to envision a decentralised form of government that features direct personal contact with leaders and popular involvement in policy deliberation and decision making (*ibid.*, 347, italics added).

The APADEP questionnaire surveys and case studies also show that workers and workers' representatives are putting their faith in participation generally, because they are also putting their faith in democracy in their immediate surroundings. By far the majority of respondents in all countries studied adopted a militant attitude to participation and stated that workers have *the right* to be informed, consulted, and to co-decide. The respondents appeared to be most of all preoccupied with access to decision making. The majority of representatives want participation to cover a whole range of issues, not only welfare but also organisation, production and key economic decisions. The institutionalisation of democracy through participation structures and mechanisms is in itself a way of nurturing a democratic culture. African workers want development, but with respect to their culture and their identity. What they value most in participation is humanism, equity, contribution to economic development and democracy (Chapter 9).

In another recent study, *Power and Democracy*, an assessment is made of the fate of workplace democracy under today's globalised and privatised enterprise, but more in general (Engelstad 2004). The study concludes that as citizens and stakeholders in the enterprise, democracy cannot ignore the work sphere where citizens spend a

major part of their lives (Engelstad and Osterud 2004b, 7). Ongoing globalisation implies economic but also cultural homogenisation, 'including the proliferation of democratic governance' (*ibid.*, 2). The right of democracy implies the duty to share power, and the development of democracy is the responsibility of all social partners. This ushers in democratic participation as an organising principle for future labour relations. Democratic participation is a universal human right and an expression of the integrity and dignity of each human being, according to the Universal Human Rights Declaration, the European Charter for Fundamental Rights and the African Charter for Popular Participation.

### The Need for a Trade Union Vision

With the demise of past mobilising regimes, labour relations have become free-floating under the law of the survival of the fittest. Globalisation and its concomitant free market neo-liberal 'ideology' have become the current frames of reference. There is not yet a viable alternative frame of reference. Protests against globalisation disrupt but do not challenge the neo-liberal agenda. Globalisation has led to an ideological void or vacuum in many parts of the world. Several publications have in this context recalled Durkheim's concept of *anomie* to describe the situation when one frame of reference has disappeared and the other is not yet in place (Kester 1996, 48; Von Holdt 2003, 298). In the gap between the old and the new, a kind of interregnum has emerged, characterised by uncertainty and disorder, disorientation and dislocation, argues Von Holdt for South Africa, and his observation is likely to apply to many other African countries.

With governments kneeling before the altar of neo-liberalism, it behoves the trade union movement to formulate a new labour ideology or philosophy, in order to create a long-term frame of reference, a new perspective. Lambert laments that a century ago the labour movement was full of confidence and vision whereas now there is ideological confusion and organisational decline (Lambert 2002, 203). Von Holdt mentions a high level of contradiction, ambiguity and uncertainty in trade union strategy (Von Holdt 2003, 305–6). The term 'at a crossroads' is expectedly often used. Baskin argues that an 'ideological glue' is needed to replace pragmatic considerations: 'many trade unionists feel highly uncomfortable to pact with employers through compromise and gradual change' (Baskin 2000, 54).

The problem in developing a strong trade union policy does not lie in the lack of opportunity. Numerous are the conferences, workshops, seminars, congresses and other assemblies, at national, regional and global level, where trade union policy is discussed. But most of these forums have donor-driven agendas on themes found important in donor countries. Thus the emphasis has shifted, over the past ten years, from gender to structural adjustment, from HIV to globalisation, from environment to child labour, and has failed to develop a comprehensive long-term trade union policy. We are left with piles of resolutions on each of the above topics, resolutions that resemble each other.

For overcoming this lack of direction it would appear to make little sense to revive old leftist ideologies. Rather, it would make sense to give more ideological content

to the concept of democracy, applying it to the economy and the workplace. A basic tenet of democracy is that it makes the decision makers accountable to those affected by these decisions, and this tenet may be applied to the relationship between capital and labour. What is needed is a fresh trade union vision of democracy. In the field of tension between liberal and social democracy, trade unions are needed to defend the prerogatives of labour. Adler and Webster suggest 'a historic compromise between capital and labour: a left version of social democracy' (Adler and Webster 2000, 18). They consider a socialist option unfeasible. And for the historic compromise to happen, labour will have to combine politics of interest representation with that of social movement forms of protest and struggle. At the same time, labour will have to use its power in a nuanced way, 'a shift from the mobilisation of power to the use of influence in the heart of decision making at the enterprise, industry and national level' (*ibid.*).

There is the need for the trade union pursuit of a vision for power sharing in society. The vision needs to incorporate policy options that enable the trade unions to meet the challenge of ensuring wider and more effective representation of workers and their interests as well as promoting their dynamic participation in decisions affecting them. A resurgence of enthusiasm for participation is needed for moral, political and practical reasons: firstly, for moral reasons because, by achieving dignity and self-respect, it can contribute to human development (essential for a people yearning for *self-development* – see Ki-Zerbo, 1992); secondly, for political reasons because democracy is not just about control of a country's administration, transparency and good governance at national level. Democracy is equally necessary in the workplace and in the economy, particularly at a time when the state's role in the economy is in decline. Who else will exercise democratic control in this vast arena? Thirdly, there are practical reasons, because human resources need to be mobilised for optimum performance and creativity. In essence, that is also the message of the thousands of grassroots trade union and worker representatives who took part in the APADEP surveys in different parts of Western and Southern Africa.

### *The need for a turnaround way of thinking*

One guiding principle of participation has long been that the right to democratic participation can be found in labour and not in capital ownership. Participation was long seen by trade unions and governments to the left of the political spectrum as one component of the *workers' struggle* against capitalism. But the debate over objectives, scope and direction of participation can also be nourished by a new way of thinking. A central notion under the latter perspective is that of *partnership* between capital and labour (a 'win-win' scenario), rather than seeking the elimination of capital. The search for shared objectives will then become a central issue. Democratic participation is then no longer primarily a *battleground* between capital and labour, implying a zero-sum or win-lose game, but a *common challenge*, a win-win game that forces all parties to reconsider the rules of the game and the roles of the actors (Kester et al. 2003, 17–18). Under the positive-sum game perspective an enterprise may be seen as the joint effort of those who provide capital and those who provide labour. The enterprise, says Engelstad, has two sources of



legitimacy: the owners and the workers. An enterprise employs people, demands their performance, conditions their lives, their training, their future. So the enterprise is also accountable to them. Paraphrasing Kant, Engelstad observes that workers in a democratic society 'should not be treated solely as a means to economic ends but also as ends in themselves' (Engelstad 2004, 214). As stakeholders and partners in the production process, workers have the right to influence the conditions of work as well as the policy of the workplace. This perspective may demand a 'turnaround' way of thinking for employers and managers as well as trade unions and workers, replacing win-lose games by win-win games as stakeholders and partners.

Trade unions may need to re-appraise the role of labour in a workplace, shedding past ideological feathers and accepting that there is nothing wrong with a well-organised, efficient and competitive enterprise and the production of wealth, but claiming at the same time that workers must be considered stakeholders, partners, citizens in the process, and that democratic procedure must govern the relationship between the different partners in production.

The turnaround way of thinking may well insert itself into the present debate on the future of trade unionism. In the current labour relations literature, there is much supportive evidence of a 'convergence' of approaches to trade unionism. The influential labour relations and trade union studies scholar Richard Hyman states that there were three 'competing' kinds of trade union approaches in the past, putting emphasis on (respectively) market, class or society. This 'eternal triangle' has constituted a main reference point for three distinct ideological orientations: business unionism (emphasis on representation of interests of members, mainly through collective bargaining), revolutionary unionism (emphasis on representing the working class through militant anti-capitalist opposition) and social movement unionism with a society orientation (emphasis on representation of the social interest through gradual improvement of social welfare). These three 'brands' of unionism had obtained a self-sustaining dynamic and have acquired considerable institutional inertia, but in fact all trade unions, Hyman argues, face in all three directions: no union can ignore market forces, nor can it escape its role as class agency or being part of society and co-existence with other constellations of interests. Trade unions are now seeking their identity within each of these three orientations (Hyman 2001, 1–5). This shift from 'either/or' into 'and/and' trade union orientation is found in many other recent publications on trade unionism (Sverke 1997; Adler and Webster 2000; Fernandez Jilberto and Riethof 2002; Jose 2002; Von Holdt 2003).

### **The Workplace as Arena for Democracy Development**

Globalisation is replicated in miniature at the workplace and if democracy is to be deepened, the workplace is a battlefield *par excellence*. As in other parts of the world, trade unions in Africa will have to find an answer to 'the flexible firm': the workplace with a hard core of (often) tenured employees, with an increasing number of workers who in different degree belong to the periphery: part-timers, persons under a 'project contract', outsourced workers, casual workers, homeworkers and teleworkers. There must be innovative strategies for organising and mobilising these workers, core and

periphery alike. If they cannot, Von Holdt warns, the unions will be unable to contest corporate reorganisation (Von Holdt 2003, 307). The greatest challenge for the union movement is to build up its strength at the workplace, because this remains their membership recruitment ground.

*Adversarial labour relations and the 'employer revolution'*

It may be argued that the best trade union strategy is to focus entirely on adversarial labour relations. Danford et al. do so for the UK, arguing for a 'strategy of disagreement', widening and deepening workplace bargaining agendas and expanding them beyond core workplaces (Danford et al. 2003, 168). They warn against betting on co-determination, in particular in the absence of strong and independent unions. Partnership agendas, they say, are driven by employer agendas, and make the workers and trade unions dependent on the employer. This will then lead to rank-and-file passivity, in particular as participation is invisible for them (*ibid.*). This tone is often heard in South Africa, where a hard and long shop-steward tradition keeps projecting itself into the future. Also in other African countries, trade unions fear that participation will weaken the trade union movement. Moreover, in most African countries trade unions *are* weak. Under these circumstances, a first urgent task for the trade union movement *is* to get collective bargaining functioning, and much of present-day energy is invested in this area.

Whatever 'strategy of non-agreement' is adopted on the part of the trade unions, strategic human resource management is becoming a central concept in modern workplace labour relations, and indeed one of the characteristics of the competitive flexible firm in the globalising economy. Africa will not escape this. In the process, management has, as it were, re-invented worker participation, but now under the perspective of achieving economic goals of efficiency and productivity. The participation initiative lies in the management camp. The privatised neo-liberal firm is characterised by a rapid spread of enterprise corporatism, extending support to and demanding loyalty of, in particular, the core workers. Management increasingly needs the commitment of those workers, and develops its own strategy, which may be the introduction of various forms of participation through which the workers can solve their problems. The multitude of participation structures reported in the case studies is a vivid demonstration of this. Financial participation may undermine collective bargaining, organisational participation may involve workers directly with management in finding solutions for workplace conditions, and consultative/co-determination forms of participation with non-unionised elected worker representatives can become rivals of the trade union. Low levels of trade union membership create a 'representation gap': there being no active trade union, the door is wide open to other forms of representation, and indeed employer-initiated participation forms fill the vacuum – but these are aiming at improvement of work performance and not at the representation of worker interests (Gollan and Markey 2001, 324). Participation initiatives on the employer side have solicited the remark that 'the notion of revolution has shifted from workers to owners' (Engelstad 2004, 211). Not only are economic markets rapidly globalising, management techniques are too. Organisational and financial participation, both relatively successful in

Japan, are applied in America as well as in Europe, at the initiative of management. They are also increasingly applied in Africa, where several governments have already legislated on financial participation. And if management does not launch such strategies this may be indicative of its conviction that it keeps a full hold over the power game. That should be bad news for the workers and for trade unions, as in particular the case studies in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Guinea show.

In view of these developments the trade unions would appear to have no other option than to play an active role in workplace participation. If they do not, management will keep the leadership in turning participation into a human resource management technique, and one cannot expect an inch to be moved in the direction of co-determination. The next move may well be to use the participation schemes as a forum in which to take up wage and employment contract issues, and this may threaten the very existence of trade unions. In particular, in the flexible firm employers are likely to create corporate structures to the benefit of only the core workers, leaving the unions to deal with atypical workers. The mere absence or indifference of trade unions may produce new forms of representation, both for the purposes of bargaining, participatory management and co-determination, under management leadership. The consequences of this assumed non-trade union context may lead to consequences which are likely to include individualisation of labour relations, progressive fragmentation and a dual labour relations system in which the better-offs obtain a positive deal for themselves and leave the trade unions to deal with negative aspects and to represent the worse-offs. This may eventually lead to further reductions in trade union membership and loss of trade union power and influence (Kester et al. 2003, 20).

*Contractual versus institutional perspectives on workplace democracy and the role of the state*

The prospects of introducing and developing meaningful, effective and democratic participation must be considered very bleak if this depends on the balance of power between employers and trade unions. Engelstad assesses that the main factor that may increase the prospect of increasing workplace democracy is that high employee involvement will be increasingly necessary for the economy. Only if the demand for human capital increases is this likely to lead to increased employee power (Engelstad 2004, 321). But scarcity of human capital will not be a major characteristic of Africa in the years to come. Is the development of workplace democracy left to the balance of power between employer and workers, or is state intervention necessary? As long as managerial prerogatives derive from property ownership, and these rights are legally protected, only legal provisions can change this unilateral power of the owners. Where participation legislation exists it was introduced under the recognition that labour as the weaker partner should get legal support to obtain information, consultation or co-determination rights. The need for such legal support was argued by researchers from Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Tanzania, as reported in Chapter 11.

Engelstad reminds us of this in the context of two classic different perspectives. The 'contractualist perspective' is used in liberal theory: property rights are a basic condition, and the state has to protect these property rights. The 'institutionalist

perspective' does not regard property rights as a primordial phenomenon, but as a result of the historic development of institutions. The breakdown of communism, the shift from socialist to social-democrat perspectives, including the 'third way', have moved closer to the contractualist perspective. Yet the state has the prerogative to impose restrictions on private property and to seek an equilibrium between ownership and other social concerns (Engelstad 2004, 216). Political intervention to create forms of participation that give workers increasing access to influence decisions of importance to them, involving them democratically in their workplaces, would require substantial normative changes in dominant conceptions of private property, along with comprehensive changes by means of legislation (*ibid.*). This was the approach in South Africa when the Workplace Forums were legislated. Ironically, it was the trade unions in this country that found these forums against their own strategy. Gollan and Markey argue that much of the debate concerning the role of the state in the development of democratic participation has centred on the concept of industrial democracy and citizenship, and they quote Fishman, who argues that 'the state is expected to protect its citizens, to guarantee minimum standards and enforce the rule of the law in all aspects of their lives, including work' (Fishman, 1995). Subsequently they quote Hammer, who defines industrial democracy as 'structures and institutional mechanisms that give workers and their representatives the opportunity to influence organisational decision making in their places of employment' (Hammer, 1997).<sup>1</sup> The state can decide to redress the power imbalance between capital and labour if that is necessary to ensure workers' influence in decision making in their places of work.

### *Legal facilitation of democratic participation<sup>2</sup>*

The democratic transformation spreading throughout Africa presents new opportunities for *participatory law making*, a process of 'negotiated corporatism' in which social partners, along with other components of civil society, directly contribute to the framing of new legislation. The state should no longer hide behind the periodic mandate of national elections designating the legislature as the law maker. This new approach requires the state to increase democratic participation in law making by negotiating with trade unions and employer representatives in the case of labour legislation. In this way, corporatism that has been so apparent in post-colonial Africa can become 'participatory' and therefore legitimate in democratic expectations. The participatory approach to law making is already evident in some countries in Africa. The enactment of the Labour Relations Act 1995 in South Africa provides an example.

This approach offers the prospect of instilling participatory values in the African national consciousness which can filter down to all social strata, including the workplace. Legal facilitation at the macro-level would be without sufficient meaning unless it was translated into practical agreements in the workplace. For worker

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1 Fishman (1995) and Hammer (1997) quoted in Gollan and Markey 2001, 336.

2 The author is grateful to Evance Kalula for his contribution to an earlier version of this section. Many of the arguments here presented are elaborated in Kalula, 2003.

participation to be elevated to a principle of economic policy it has to be enshrined in a *statutory framework* catering for arrangements in the workplace. Thus a regime of rights and procedures has to be created in the workplace. The aim is to ensure that trade unions and workers are fully involved in designing and overseeing changes at the workplace and industry levels, including policy issues. Thus the law has to define the role of workplace participatory arrangements and rights of role players. For example, in what instances should there be rights of consultation, joint decision making and veto? Such rights have to be defined in the light of company law which, in effect, is in conflict with participation objectives. Instances of conflict have to be eliminated or harmonised. Equally important are procedural aspects of participatory arrangements. How are such arrangements to be established? Who has access to such participatory forums as part of the electorate and as representatives? Are such arrangements to be established through trade union structures or through workers directly? If the latter approach is taken, what precautions should the law put in place to ensure that trade unions are not undermined? All these and other constitutional arrangements have to be clearly provided for by law. In this way a regime of rights and duties in a participatory setting is established, by means of the judiciary if need be.

The aim of labour policy in any democratic society should be to protect substantive and procedural rights at work, and to support orderly negotiation and conflict resolution when interests differ. It is also to encourage effective pursuit of joint gains and to facilitate participation. In today's environment, particularly in the African context of realities, the basic aim of labour policy should go beyond contractual obligations and provide a framework for the involvement of workers in problem solving and decision making – the hallmarks of participation.

### **The Trade Union 'Lever'**

On either track, voluntary or intervention, the *push* for meaningful, democratic and effective workplace democratisation has to come from the trade unions. This will increase its legitimacy vis-à-vis organised labour, assure its co-operation when implementing, and will help to demarcate collective bargaining and participation grounds. In West European countries, workers' councils were able to benefit from the support of trade unions who constituted a forceful 'lever' for the development of workplace democracy. They supported the workers' councils logistically, with expert advice, training and education, and above all – on the basis of monitoring, research and evaluation – they influenced politics and governments for the improvement and restructuring of forms of participation (Kester and Pinaud 1996a; Gollan and Markey 2001, 332).

Fishman reminds us that individuals at the workplace are always weaker than their employer and collective representation is the only means of redressing this imbalance (*ibid.*). Engelstad adds that 'real participation in decision making will not arise without collective pressure, and without collective pressure on the part of the employees participation will soon become insignificant' (Engelstad 2004, 231). That is why the trade unions are an indispensable lever. Elected worker representatives

across enterprises, sectors and industries can also build up collective strength through associations of whatever format. But then, they are simply re-inventing the trade union wheel! Trade unions are a necessary lever for meaningful, effective and democratic participation of workers, assuring a synergy between different channels of representation.

As repeatedly reported in this book, trade unions in Africa hesitate to support workplace democracy and this stems from a misunderstanding that appears rather stubborn. It is widely believed that participation at the workplace will weaken the trade unions. This was most strongly expressed in South Africa (long under the whip of Von Holdt in many articles in the *South African Labour Bulletin*). But also in the other African countries studied – as the case studies show – trade unions are not eager to opt for participation, with the possible exception of Tanzania. The argument that participation weakens trade unions when they actively support participation does not hold. The European countries of Germany, The Netherlands, Austria, Italy and the Scandinavian countries are examples (Pinaud 1996, 11–25). In this respect it is interesting to cite one of the main conclusions of Schiphorst regarding the Zimbabwe case studies: trade unions have missed the opportunity to *strengthen* themselves at workplace level, had they supported instead of ignored the workers' committees and works councils (Schiphorst 2001, 347–63).

In view of increasing employer and management initiatives to develop forms of organisational and financial participation (possibly linked to corporatist works councils and board representation), trade unions would appear not to have an alternative: if they leave the initiative to employers and management, they will lose their hold on labour relations in the firm. Without the backing of a strong independent union, participation is most likely to become manipulative. Trade unions can only get a grip on what happens in the flexible firm if it deals with collective bargaining *and* direct participation *and* co-determination. A 'strategy of disagreement' should serve as basis for a 'strategy of participation'. The trade unions will have to gain strength in bargaining as its capacity to attract membership will foremost depend on its delivery in negotiations. Only on that basis can it give leadership and support to participation. The paradox is that strong adversarial trade unionism is a condition for worker consultation and co-determination.

## Conclusion

Workplace democracy is not written in grand letters today. Globalisation has shaken up the world in many ways, and labour has come more under strain. Initiatives are taken, this time by management and employers, to introduce participatory management as well as financial participation. The increase of worker influence in decision making is not employer business, it is trade union business. If meaningful, effective and democratic worker participation is to be developed, supported and defended, trade union involvement is indispensable. A strong trade union counter-policy is lacking at the moment it is vitally needed.

There is nothing wrong as such with a strong economy, with productivity, competitive markets, etc. But a crucial question is: economy for whom? The economy

provides goods and services to society. Democracy should be the instrument with which to ensure that the economy serves the society, instead of society serving the economy. The great challenge of the 21st century will therefore be how to achieve, consolidate, widen and deepen democracy. This is a political as much as an economic and labour relations challenge. The great lesson of the 20th century is that fascism, state socialism, dictatorship or any other form of unilaterally imposed government has led to disaster, to war, to suppression and poverty.

Democracy means making decision makers accountable to the citizens affected by those decisions. Periodic general elections are an important instrument for this. But democracy becomes stronger to the extent that citizens can democratically influence decisions in all spheres of life on a continuing basis. A most important challenge for Africa is to create that difficult but necessary link between economic development and democracy. Democracy can only develop if the citizens of a country or of a continent can take their destiny in their own hands, also at their places of work. Sustainable development requires sustainable democracy.

Workers' participation, like democracy, is a dynamic process which has to be constantly proposed and learned, achievements need to be defended and new challenges have to be met. Any shortcomings in the short term are not proof of participation's failure. Rather, they are lessons – part of the learning experience. Support for democracy in the economic spheres of citizens is not likely to arise without collective pressure and assuring a synergy between different channels of representation – and indeed the trade unions are ideally placed to play this broker and lever role. In particular, trade unions are necessary to campaign for democratic institutions in the workplace which seek an equilibrium between ownership and other social concerns.

The African trade union movement is at a crossroads: the adversarial or the participatory avenue? Both are necessary. The trade union movement needs to develop a vision on what kind of society and, in particular, what kind of workplace it has in mind when formulating policy, agenda and action. The thesis of this book is that the trade unions hold the key to workplace democracy.

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