A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of gray and red, arranged in a pattern that suggests a world map or a network of connections.

Trade Unions in Transformation

A Case Study of the National Union of Textile,
Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria

ISMAIL BELLO
October 2017

- Following massive losses of factory jobs the NUTGTWN embarked on a new strategy of organizational inclusion of self-employed tailors and flanking this new approach with intensified political campaigns in support of factory employment in the sector.
- The new strategy will need to address and find common ground for representing the interests of the union's different constituencies. Union education and training programs along with increased member involvement are essential.
- Trade Unions in Transformation is an FES project that identifies unions' power resources and capabilities that contribute to successful trade union action. This study features among two dozen case studies from around the world demonstrating how unions have transformed to get stronger.



Contents

Abstract	3
1. Introduction	3
2. The Emergence of NUTGTWN as a Vibrant Union	4
2.1 The Impact of NLC Campaigns on Union Organizing	5
2.2 Textile Industry Crisis and the Struggle for a Living Wage	5
3. Internal Restructuring and Organizational Renewal	6
3.1 Informal Sector Organizing	7
3.1.1 Recruitment of Self-Employed Tailors as NUTGTWN Members.	7
3.1.2 Debating the Recruitment of Self-Employed Tailors.	8
3.1.3 Education as a Tool for Organizing	9
3.1.4 Recruitment of Self-Employed Tailors and the Changing Structure of the Union ..	10
3.1.5 Consolidating the Organization of Self-Employed Tailors.	11
3.2 Campaigns and Policy Advocacy	11
3.2.1 Campaigns: The Lessons of History.	12
3.2.2 Campaigns and Global Solidarity: Bilateral Exchange with SACTWU.	12
3.2.3 Campaigns and Global Solidarity: IndustriALL's Campaign	13
4. Conclusion: Achievements and Future Challenges	13
References	15

Abstract

The study discusses the transformation of the National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria (NUTGTWN) in an era of declining membership utilizing the power resources model. Union membership among factory workers had declined from around 60,000 in 2000 to less than 20,000 in 2016. The decline in membership means a fall in the structural power which had defined the union in terms of its vibrancy and strength in collective bargaining and visibility in the Nigeria labour movement since inception in 1978. The study shows that the union has tried to regain strength and vibrancy through different phases of challenge in the industry by building capacities to expand associational and societal powers through organizing of self-employed tailors and campaigns and advocacy for the revival of textile factories. Organizing strategies for self-employed tailors have promoted a transition from manifest to active membership and integration into the union. In particular, the union endeavors to consider the peculiar needs of the self-employed tailors for protection, access to credit, as well as capacity and skill development. To sustain and deepen this process, it is important that union education and training strategies must address both the soft and hard skills requirement of the self-employed tailors.

1. Introduction

The National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria (NUTGTWN) was one of the most dominant unions in the Nigerian trade union movement in the last three decades of the twentieth century, with membership at points in excess of 75,000 workers. At the time, the Nigerian textile industry was a critical segment of the emerging industrial sector, contributing as much as 22 percent to the country's GDP. At its peak in the 1980s, the textile industry employed up to 500,000 workers directly, making it the second largest employer after the government. Yet the ascendancy of neoliberalism in the 1990s as the economic policy framework has led to market liberalization and economic deregulation, with attendant consequences for local industries, particularly the textile and garment sector which the union organizes.

Until the 1990s and early 2000s, union membership was in excess of 60,000. This strength of numbers to a large part enabled the union to establish a regime of industrial justice and improve conditions of service through collective bargaining, as well as to ride out the many redundancies and closures witnessed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This period attracted the attention of the Swedish scholars Gunilla Andræ and Bjorn Beckman who conducted a detailed study of the union, published in the form of book entitled *Union Power in the Nigeria Textile Industry*. Other publications documenting the achievements of the union include *Weaving into History* [1998] by Owei Lakemfa and *National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria: The Social*

Relevance of Trade Unionism [2001] by Issa Aremu, the union's current General Secretary.

These publications document the enormous structural and associational powers of the union and its emergence as a dominant force in the Nigerian trade union movement. The authors relate how a very poor and organizationally weak union overcame significant hurdles to become one of the leading lights of the Nigerian trade union movement. For example, Andræ and Beckman's study, utilizing the principle of labour regimes, underscored NUTGTWN's achievement in negotiating and managing a union-based labour regime in the textile industry during a period of economic restructuring and its ability to defend workers' interests and rights in doing so. Aremu and Lakemfa, on the other hand, focused on critical achievements of the union in wage negotiations and in defending of workers' rights and education, both driven by focused leadership and active membership participation.

However, developments in the industry and the economy have repeatedly weakened the structural power of the workers, and the union has in turn sought to expand its associational and societal power in order to regain its strength while the industry has contended with several different challenges. Developments in the industry have led the union to make strategic choices to reorganize internally and thereby meet the needs of its members, as well as to remain relevant in the national labour movement. In particular, its decision to expand the scope of its membership base beyond factory workers to include self-employed tailors is a milestone with potentially far-reaching consequences and demands for innovation.

As our case study will show, the transformation of NUTGTWN is a case of developing new power resources and re-energizing internal union capabilities to deliver on the union mandate.

2. The Emergence of NUTGTWN as a Vibrant Union

By 1980, Nigeria had become an industrial giant by African standards, with the largest textile industry after Egypt and South Africa. The share of the textile industry in employment and value added in manufacturing were estimated at 20 and 15 per cent respectively (Andrae and Beckman 1998, Aremu 2001).

However, the textile sector was one of the most difficult to organize as employers resisted union organization, sacked union branch leaders and sought to have full-time unionists arrested and, at times, charged to court. These battles, which had been underway since the 1960s, became yet more intense after the merger of workplace and area unions in the textile sector following the restructuring of trade unions from 1976 to 1978 by the Murtala-Obasanjo Military Administration.

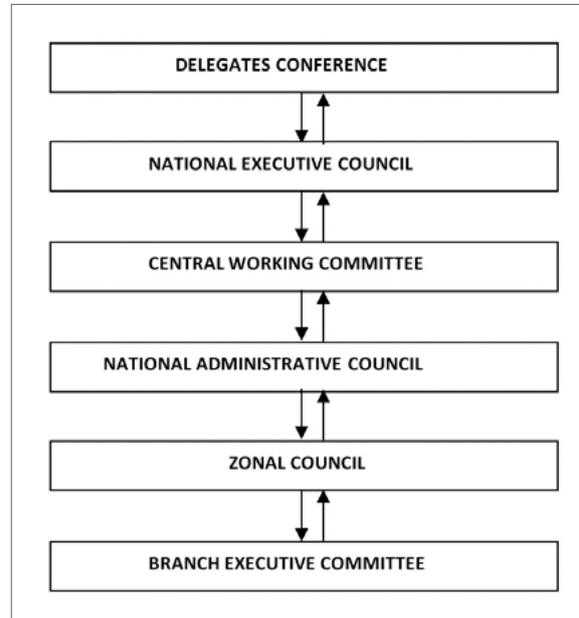
When NUTGTWN was founded in 1977, it had 34 Branches and 11 Zones with over 70,000 members: by November 1980, the number of Branches had risen to 80 and 14 Zones with over 75,000 members.

NUTGTWN's governance structure consists of the following: Branch Executive Committee, the Zonal Council, the National Administrative Council (NAC), the Central Working Committee (CWC), the National Executive Council (NEC) and the Delegates' Conference.

The branch is the factory-level union. Each factory with at least 25 members elects nine officers, including at least one woman, to run union affairs in the factory for terms of three years. In addition, shop stewards are elected in large factories to represent workers in different departments and thereby complement the work of the nine union executives. Self-employed tailors operate in the different federal states as a branch of the union.

The Zonal Council is a combination of branch unions with at least 5000 members in a delineated geographical area. The self-employed tailors' branch participates in zonal

Figure 1: Nutgtwn – Governance, Activism and Membership under Declining Employment



council meetings and activities in their area. The Zonal Council meets quarterly and deliberates on issues affecting members in the different branches. The Zonal Secretary, a full time union staff member with the rank of Assistant General Secretary, oversees the affairs of the zone and reports to the Secretariat as well other organs like the CWC and NEC. As part of the union's affirmative action, there are women's groups in all the zones and female tailors take part in meetings and other activities of the union.

The Central Working Committee and the National Executive Council are constitutional bodies which hold quarterly and annual meetings respectively, as stipulated in the constitution. Their powers and functions include policy decisions, disciplinary decisions and appointment of officers with the NEC who the power to overturn the decisions of CWC. The NEC consists of two elected representatives from the zones in addition to regular CWC members.

The Delegates' Conference is the supreme decision making body of the union. Delegates are drawn on the basis of one representative per 300 members, and the conference is held once every four years. Self-employed tailors have only participated as observers in 2012 and 2016, but the union constitution has been amended to make the full participation of tailors possible at the 2020 conference, provided they are up to date with payment

of dues of N100 (30 US dollar cents) for 300 members in their branch, as stipulated in the constitution.

The increasing liberalization of the economy since the structural adjustment years in the mid-1980s and the full liberalization of the textile market following the adoption of the WTO guidelines by the Abacha regime in 1997 had led to the unprecedented decline in textile and garment manufacturing in Nigeria. At the onset of the current crisis in 1998, the industry directly employed 137,000 people, but, as the table below shows, employment in the industry has declined steeply, with a corresponding decline in union membership which escalated after 2000.

As can be seen from figures above, union membership of industrial workers declined from around 62,000 in year 2000 to less than 20,000 in 2016. Notwithstanding the monumental decline in union membership over the last 15 years, the union has kept the tradition of shop-floor activism, keeping the union strong on the factory floor. It has also been successful in legal defence cases over unpaid gratuities and entitlements following factory closures. Most importantly, the NUTGTWN has been able to consolidate its associational power through the gradual organization of tailors across the country. With the combined strength of self-employed tailors across the states, NUTGTWN membership strength currently stands at about 35,000 and that number is growing.

Table 1: Employment and Union Membership

Year	Employment in the Industry	Union Membership
1980	350,000	75,000+
1986	200,000	46,000
1990	250,000	50,000
1996	137,000	60,000
2000	83,000	62,000
2004	57,000	48,000
2008	24,000	23,000*
2012	24,000	30,000**
2016	27,000	35,000***

* About 3000 members were self-employed tailors.

** 10,000 were self-employed tailors.

*** 15,000+ are self-employed tailors. Active membership fluctuates around the level of 9000 tailors. The union estimates that approximately 15,000 self-employed tailors have signed up for union membership over time.

2.1 The Impact of NLC Campaigns on Union Organizing

The remarkable achievements of NUTGTWN in the 1980s and 1990s under General Secretary Adams Oshiomhole paved the way for him to emerge as the President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in February 1999, although the Abacha regime openly opposed his candidacy. More than any previous leadership, the NLC under him will be remembered for systematically refocusing trade union education; for enduring struggles against casualization; as well as for consistent campaigns against unfavorable government policies in several areas including pensions, deregulation of the downstream petroleum sector, corruption and good governance.

NUTGTWN has been a strong affiliate of the NLC since its inception in 1978, and has played a prominent role since 1988 when Oshiomhole first entered office as the Deputy President of NLC. Thereafter, NUTGTWN officials have played key roles in the work of the NLC and the union was the pillar of NLC organizing when it was proscribed between 1994 and 1999.

The NLC's organizing campaigns between 2000 and 2005 and, in particular, its picketing activities had created ripple effects for trade union organizing in the country as employers' resistance was broken by many of its affiliates and union density surged in the organized private sector. NUTGTWN leadership and cadre were part of these processes of change in the NLC at both national and state level and it provided a great learning opportunity for the union to strengthen its organizing and campaigns for the revival of the textile industry.

For NUTGTWN this meant that despite the effect of declining performance and union membership in the sector, it exercised sufficient power to engage in routine collective bargaining and negotiations for review of industry wide agreements on an annual basis.

2.2 Textile Industry Crisis and the Struggle for a Living Wage

From the year 2000 onwards, the decline in the industry did not abate and it became clear that manufacturers were struggling with declining profitability. The conditions of workers deteriorated with raging double-digit

inflation and declining real wages. Every year, the textile employers would request a moratorium on collective bargaining negotiations. The union did not accede to these requests and recorded significant in the face of daunting challenges in the industry.

For instance, the industry average wage had nominally trailed the national average in 2001 because the NLC, through tripartite negotiation with the Federal Government and the Employers' Federation, had raised the minimum wage from N3,500 to N7,500 and had pegged the basic component at N4,000. In perhaps one of the most difficult negotiations in the industry, the union was torn between accepting a N7,500 package with basic pegged at N2,800 or a N7,000 package with basic set at N4,000. After weeks of discussions and consultations, the union strategically settled for the N7,000 option with basic at N4,000. The union had taken the decision based on the fact that many other benefits including overtime regulations, leave allowance, housing allowance, gratuity and pension computation depended on the basic component. Subsequent negotiations over the years have restored parity as industry minimum wage currently stands at about N32,000 (approximately 105 US dollars), representing about 75 per cent above current national minimum wage of N18,000.¹ The wage structure for all categories of employees is also adjusted based on the outcome of negotiations in the industry.

The union also continued to win concessions in plant-level negotiations. These improvements in the face of declining industrial performance in the textile sector clearly underscore the unwavering power of the union at the branch level. This success is thanks largely to the resilience of the branch union and the competence of its officials supported by Zonal and National Officers.

3. Internal Restructuring and Organizational Renewal

When the current General Secretary assumed office in 2000, the union was already experiencing the dangers of liberalization of textile imports and was soon greeted with closure in rapid succession of some of the biggest

mills in the industry: Kaduna Textile Limited, AREWA Textiles, Finetex Limited, and Nortex Limited. Some of the largest mills in Lagos followed in quick succession, including Nigeria Textile Mills PLC, Specomill Ltd, Enpee Industries Ltd and Afprint PLC. In the space of few years with closure of Asaba Textile Mills PLC and Aba Textile PLC, the union had lost over 40,000 members, a decline which served to demoralize the union and its leadership.

Following the liberalization of textile imports in the late nineties and the on-set of massive membership decline in 2001–2002, union organ meetings began to discuss how to reposition the union for the challenges ahead. A review of the minutes of discussions at the NAC and CWC reveal a lot of emphasis on declining membership and the corresponding need for union renewal. The need for review was also taken as part of the discussions at union strategic planning workshops for union leadership held between 2001 and 2003.

In 2003, the union recruited five young and vibrant organizers trained through the NLC Harmattan and Rain Schools² as well as other trade union platforms, some of whom had also gained international exposure through an organizers' exchange programme with Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU). Union organizers were also supported in enrolling for diploma and degree courses at polytechnics and universities. This has assisted the union in breeding a new crop of skilled and committed organizers who have since shown great resilience in the face of daunting challenges on the factory floor and in the industry as a whole.

By 2008, it had become clear that despite the successful work of the new organizers, the continuing decline in membership required further steps of internal reorganization. Through a decision made by the NAC and the CWC, endorsed by the NEC and the Delegates' Conference, the union reduced the number of union staff and retired those long-serving organizers aged 60 or older. The union itself was restructured, reducing the number of zones from eight to three. The number of workers comprising a zone was reduced to 5000 and a combination of other factories less than 5000 was made an area council.

1. At the current official exchange rate of N305 to one dollar, the current minimum wage in the textile sector is about 105 dollars. But it must be noted that the naira has been devalued severally since 2000. In 2000 official exchange rate was about N80 naira to one dollar.

2. http://www.nlcng.org/search_details.php?id=115.

NUTGTWN has shown great resilience with regard to organizing of new workplaces. A typical example is the case of Lela Agro-Sack in Kano, where the union moved from picketing to the courtroom to the negotiating table, thereby gaining management understanding over the recruitment of over 500 workers in the Woven Sack manufacturing plant in Kano. After over a decade of struggle including a negative Industrial Arbitration Panel judgement restraining the union from further picketing of the firm, the office of the General Secretary initiated a new process of dialogue with the management of the LELA Agro-Sack, suggesting that the company needed a responsible and supportive trade union to achieve its business goals. Eventually, in April 2014, after series of informal meetings and discussions, the union secured management's understanding to work together as partners. The union has since taken root in Lela Agro-Sack a decade after the unionization process was initiated.

3.1 Informal Sector Organizing

Beyond the increased dedication of resources to organizing new and existing textile factories and the decisions on internal reorganization, the NUTGTWN embarked on a completely new path of capacity building, expanding the frontiers of organizing to include previously-excluded self-employed tailors and garment makers. The major challenge in doing so was to bring a new constituency into the union without endangering its basis of support among factory workers steeped in a robust tradition of participatory organizing.

In 2005, the Central Working Committee set up a membership recruitment committee with the mandate to develop programmes and activities to strengthen union organizing in factories, and with a specific mandate to develop strategies for informal sector organizing. The committee developed the framework and organized series of meetings with tailors in Lagos that led to the initial recruitment of self-employed tailors there. Initially, the committee comprised of CWC members with the author serving as Secretary, but was later expanded to include a select group of Nigeria Union of Tailors officials in Lagos, who collaborating in drawing up the framework and programme of action. The recommendations of the Committee formed the basis of the constitutional amendment in 2008 and the subsequent organizing processes of the self-employed tailors.

Following this initial success in Lagos, this process was extended to other parts of Nigeria. Before going into the internal development and impact of this decision to recruit self-employed tailors, we will present some detail on the formal recruitment process itself.

3.1.1 Recruitment of Self-Employed Tailors as NUTGTWN Members

Self-employed tailors are spread across Nigeria already organized into associations, albeit with differing strength across federal states. In several states in the South West, they are quite well organized, with the Nigeria Union of Tailors being the dominant association. In Lagos, the Tailors' Association has a history of over 50 years of organizing members; in Abeokuta, Ogun State, the Association has a rich history spanning over 40 years. The associations are organized much more like cultural and social groups, although are occasionally organized into cooperatives.

Different states provide varying examples of the organizational status and role of the self-employed tailors. In such states as Lagos, Ogun, and Kwara, the self-employed tailors are recruited through their association, the Nigeria Union of Tailors (NUT), but in other states like Kebbi, Edo and Kaduna, self-employed tailors are recruited as NUTGTWN members directly. Where the recruitment is through the association, the leadership of the association and the NUTGTWN is often fused, with the association asserting dominance, but where is recruitment direct, the leadership is NUTGTWN-focused.

While the committee in Lagos had sought out the well-organized NUT and had agreed to a framework of action after several meetings, the Makurdi tailors, from Benue State, had sought out the union in Kaduna as part of an effort to consolidate their infant organization, formed in response to a directive from the State Government for all tailors in Makurdi to relocate to a newly constructed market in the city. Working with the union and the Nigeria Labour Congress in Benue State, they successfully resisted this directive. Although a small segment relocated, the bigger body stood its ground and, forming the basis of the birth of a new union of Makurdi Tailors. The union has grown into organizing in 5 zones in the state with three of the zones currently very active in participating in union activities.

The organizing efforts in Lagos, Abeokuta (Ogun State), Ilorin (Kwara State) and Lokoja (Kogi State) are very much a kind of affiliation, as many of the recruited members were officers and members of the existing Nigeria Union of Tailors. During a field visit in Abeokuta, I met with the Elders' Council of the NUT, who seemed to exert control on the union leadership who are also NUT members. Nonetheless it is clear that they are supportive of tailors' membership of NUTGWN. They recognized that both the formal textile industry and the informal tailoring and garment sectors are threatened by the pressure of imports and they have common interests calling for protection by government. The Federal Government is the logical target of demands both for the textile union and the tailor's association, and the union has a pronounced programme for campaign and advocacy for the revival of textile and garment sector.

In Kaduna, the association stands side-by-side with the NUTGTWN Branch. The Kaduna tailors' branch of NUTGTWN recently concluded a state conference in which the union leader who emerged had lost in the state association election as candidate for chairman. The association had attempted to impose a candidate, but the union organizing secretary insisted on the union rules which qualified him and other contestants, which all parties had previously agreed to.

In Kebbi State, the pioneer Chairman Alhaji Muhammadu Kura Tela and his executive members have established union structures in the State's 21 local government areas, with over 3000 members. Established in 2011, the State Branch participates actively in the NLC and has a robust relationship with the Kebbi State Government. The Chairman stated that the tailors' membership of NUTGTWN has fostered unity and provided members great opportunity to attend conferences and other educational programmes across the country. In our interview, the Chairman spoke of a proposal to the State Government for the establishment of a vocational training center for tailors in the state.

In Edo State, the union is gaining strength as the leadership of the association is also the leadership of the union. The union is gaining strength and visibility perhaps more than anywhere else. The union recently celebrated Tailors' Day with over 2000 members in attendance drawn from around 28 zones. The event, attended by the Union President, John Adaji, was de-

clared open by the Edo State Commissioner for Labour and Special Duties, Didi Adodo. In my conversation with the Chairman, Isaiah Onaiwu Okungbowa, he acknowledged that the union is capable of organizing 10,000 members in the state. Currently, there are around 2000 members with about 500 of them active in payment of dues. He assured me of a new membership recruitment drive across the state. The union is actively involved in the activities of the NLC in the state and also collaborates with government officials on matters that affect taxation and other, making explicit that they are yet to have more structured engagement with the State. Edo is a peculiar case that has also been unwittingly aided by the fact that the former General Secretary and President of the NLC, Adams Oshiomhole holds sway as the Executive Governor of Edo State.

3.1.2 Debating the Recruitment of Self-Employed Tailors

At the onset of the recruitment of self-employed tailors in 2005, there were heated debates at union meetings as to the relevance of recruitment of this category of workers. Many officers argued that organizing the tailors would not make significant improvement in union finances, but others argued that union is about building power of the working class and that informal sector organizing will benefit the union and the self-employed group. The leadership kept focus, insisting that given the shifting structure of the economy in which the informal economy contributes as much as 70 per cent of the workforce, NUTGTWN must factor in the self-employed tailors if it is to continue building union power.

Andr e and Beckman (2010a: 94) had observed in their research paper that »threatened by massive industrial decline, it seems that the industrial textile union had primarily identified the tailors and their associations as potential sources of new members. These are important not just to provide the necessary income required to finance the secretariat, pay staff salaries and so on, but as a source of bargaining strength. Approaching the tailors has been facilitated by the way in which they have established their own associations, forming a party to talk to, to negotiate with«.

NUTGTWN leadership also sees informal sector organizing as an opportunity to strengthen union membership

and increase women's participation. By organizing in the informal sector, the NUTGTWN has not only managed to build their membership but has also attained a higher proportion of women members. The General Secretary, Issa Aremu recognizes the enormous potential in terms of numbers that the self-employed tailors provide for union's collective action »the informal sector workers have helped to reinforce the NUTGTWN's campaigns because they are greater in number.«

Even though Andr  and Beckman had also concluded in their research on the Nigerian experience (2010) that the main challenge to the unions is to expand the frontiers of labour rights and organization, they also seem to suggest that the capacity of trade unions in this respect depends on how effectively they can defend and organize themselves »on their own turf« i. e. the factories.

However, our experience and findings also show that organizing the informal sector is also a strategic choice to strengthen organization in the formal sector. At one level, union organizers are constantly mobilized to organize whether formal or informal. At another, the union is building a wide network of organizers with trade union consciousness across the divide. For instance, the attempt to organize workers in a small garment factory in the Export Processing Zone in Calabar was spearheaded by self-employed tailors who are members of the union. They had worked with the Nigeria Labour Congress in Cross River State and the union organizer in the effort to organize the factory. Similar efforts in Osun also enjoyed the popular support of the Tailoring Association in the state. When Majestic Industries was organized in October 2013, there were hundreds of tailors among other industrial workers who picketed the firm and made the recruitment of over 200 workers possible.

The General Secretary emphasized that the informal sector workers have helped to reinforce the union's campaign because they are greater in number. On a wider scale, the self-employed tailors have constituted large army of campaigners since 2009 when the union began mass rallies in Lagos and Abuja. The benefits of informal sector organization are only too real, not forgetting that the tailors did not just have this level of consciousness from the get-go. It has been through a gradual process of induction, education and mobilization that these benefits have materialized. Since 2006, when the first set of tailors attended the union annual education conference,

the number of tailors attending the conference has risen astronomically, such that they constitute more than 50 per cent of participants over the last eight years. Constitutional changes have also ensured that women members participate at Women's Zonal Council meetings and other educational programmes of the union.

3.1.3 Education as a Tool for Organizing

Over the years, there has been training and re-training programmes for organizers to meet the specific challenge of organizing self-employed tailors. Since 2009 the union has worked in partnership with trade union support organizations to hold a series of workshops for union organizers drawn from the union and the informal sector to promote on the one hand the understanding of the union values and ethics and to engender practical understanding of the needs of the self-employed Tailors.

These training activities have helped to resolve the raging debates and discussion on the relevance of organizing self-employed tailors and Kampala makers and also helped to reassure the self-employed group that the union would be of benefit to its teeming members.

The union continues to create platform for conscious development of union interest and a deep understanding of the workings of trade unions. Wherever a tailors' branch is launched, induction training is organized to acquaint the newly elected union representatives with basic union issues and their roles as NUTGTWN representatives. Informal sector members of NUTGTWN also participated at the STREETNET Conference in 2010. The conference brought about a renewed commitment of the union's leadership to further strengthen organizing and recruitment of self-employed tailors. The conference also provided a rich platform for the union to network and relate with informal sector organizations across the world.

The union has continued to develop programmes and activities aimed at addressing the specific needs and concerns of tailors. In an effort to develop a project of sustainable capacity development for self-employed tailors, NUTGTWN has been working with United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to develop a framework to draw on existing resources and infrastructure among relevant institutions and agencies

of Government like Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN), Bank of Industry, (BOI), Nigeria Export Promotion Council (NEPC) and Industrial Training Fund (ITF).

The concerns of informal sector garment makers are not exactly as those of industrial workers and may include issues such as access to credit, excessive taxation, fighting harassment by government officials etc. These specialized programmes are aimed at addressing these specific needs of the self-employed tailors and strengthen the union's organizing process.

3.1.4 Recruitment of Self-Employed Tailors and the Changing Structure of the Union

Informal sector organizing is new to the union and the union has coped commendably in integrating informal garment workers into its activities. The process has faced

many challenges which have understandably slowed progress, but as the table below shows, the organization of self-employed tailors in only 14 of Nigeria's 37 states has brought the union a latent membership of over 100,000 self-employed tailors across the states and there are already about 27,000 manifest members, although only about 9,000 are active paying their dues, attending meetings and participating regularly in the activities of the union. Latent membership applies to those self-employed tailors across the states that constitute the greater potential that has not been reached by the union, but are already loosely organized into various associations of tailors. The manifest members are the tailors who are already members of associations, particularly the NUT, in cities and the states who are interested and occasionally participate in union programmes and activities without being registered members of the union. Overall the potential is huge and massive as there are over 100,000 self-employed tailors in these states alone and more than across the whole country.

Table 2: Membership Profile of Self-employed Tailors Across States in Nigeria as at December 2016

	State	Latent Membership	Manifest Membership	Active Membership
1	Kebbi	10,000	3,000	1,000
2	Lagos	20,000	5,000	2,000
3	Edo	20,000	5,000	1,500
4	Benue/Makurdi	5,000	2,000	300
5	Kogi	5,000	2,000	500
6	Kaduna	5,000	1,000	500
7	Ogun	5,000	1,000	500
8	Kwara	3,000	1,000	300
9	Kano	10,000	3,000	1,000
10	Imo	3,000	500	200
11	Cross-River	3,000	500	100
12	Niger	5,000	1,000	150
13	Fct	10,000	1,000	500
14	Katsina	5,000	1,000	500
	Total	109,000	27,000	9,050

The progress made in the recruitment of self-employed tailors has been supported by changes in the union constitution made to accommodate the recruitment of self-employed tailors. At the 2008 Delegates' Conference, the membership clause was amended to allow for recruitment of tailors and Kampala makers. Check-off dues were also set at N100 which represents around 30 US dollar cents per month per member. Since then, a lot of progress has been made to integrate self-employed tailors. In the three zones and area councils, women self-employed tailors serve on the women's committee and one of the tailors is vice-chairperson of the National Women's Committee. Tailors in Lagos and Kaduna have offices in the Secretariat buildings of the union.

Further constitutional changes were made at the union conference held in Kano in March 2016. From the next conference in 2020, it would be possible for tailors to attend as delegates from the different states provided they are up to date with payment of dues for at least 300 members in line with rule 4 (11) of the union constitution. Other constitutional amendments include representation at Zonal Council meetings.

3.1.5 Consolidating the Organization of Self-Employed Tailors

In our interviews across the states, the self-employed members of the union confirmed increased visibility of the self-employed tailors arising from the organizational learning that membership of the NUTGTWN has brought. In Benue State, arising from the recognition of self-employed tailors as authentic representatives of NUTGTWN, the tailors had received support from the NLC to pay rent for office space. In Edo State, the government had given the tailors 100 machines and two million Naira grant with a further pledge of 75 million Naira revolving loan. In Kebbi, the branch had received support for some members through the NLC under the state-run poverty alleviation scheme. In other states, the tailors are quite active in all activities of the NLC. It is clear to see that the union is cultivating a new crop of activists who are developed through the union education and capacity building activities as well as the leadership development opportunities offered by the NUTGTWN and the NLC through its meetings and training activities at the State level.

There is no doubt that the visibility of the union has been enhanced with union presence in 14 of the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Given the current state of the industry, union presence based on factory representation would have been restricted to only Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, Katsina and Ogun States, but with recruitment of self-employed tailors associational power has been extended to more states than even during the 1980s and 1990s.

The potential to build on the associational power of the union through organizing of self-employed tailors is enormous, but several of the leadership of the self-employed groups I interviewed raised the critical challenge of dues collection and this the General Secretary admits: »Establishing a fair system for membership dues is a challenge when dealing with informal sector workers.« This said, he points out that »if our union can find ways to provide services that workers in the informal sector find valuable, then they are willing to pay for them«. The union offered annual education programmes that were heavily subsidized. The fees were reduced at the start but now the union has increased them gradually and the members are willing to pay because they are eager for an education.

Education and training broadly remain essential to NUTGTWN organizing the self-employed tailors, but beyond the traditional trade union education, the union must consolidate its skill and capacity building training activities in partnership with other state and non-state development agencies to provide opportunities for self-employed tailors on a sustainable basis.

3.2 Campaigns and Policy Advocacy

NUTGTWN has demonstrated that the power base of the union is not restricted to the factory floor as the union – under threat – mobilized support from other affiliates of the Nigeria Labour Congress, the NLC itself and civil society to campaign for the revival of the industry. The union's proactive engagement perhaps explains the continued existence of the textile and garment sector in Nigeria, the massive decline notwithstanding.

Unions are generally declining not just because of economic downturn, but also specifically because of the lack of organizing based on working-class principles

and values. The textile union has been able to endure because of its strength of organization and mass education. Many unions facing similar challenges are collapsing because those unions were not educationally and organizationally prepared for ravaging attacks on jobs by the exploitative and anti-labour policies of neoliberalism. These policies need to be effectively engaged by the unions or else unions would get weakened gradually and eventually may collapse altogether (Abiodun Aremu interview).

NUTGTWN's processes of engagement over the years including policy dialogue, rallies and media campaign dovetailed into the African Industrialization Day Campaign organized as part of the activities in pursuit of the Sustainable Industrial policy goal of IndustriALL Global Union Federation.

As a result of its organizing visibility, the union has enjoyed institutional powers over the years through representation in critical institutions of state. In the last two decades, the union had served in several critical national committees such as National Minimum Wage Committee, the tripartite National Labour Advisory Committee (NLAC), the Vision 2010 Committee of the Federal Government, Federal Government Committee on Deregulation of the Petroleum sector. With specific reference to the textile sector, the union had drawn on its vociferous campaign over the years to be part of all institutional arrangements for the revival of the textile and garment sector in Nigeria since year 2000. Currently, the General Secretary serves on the committee for the implementation of the Cotton, Textile and Garment (CTG) Policy, set up by the office of the Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo.

These institutional power linkages have ensured that the union is in a position to lobby for quick fix policies, alongside textile employers, at critical times for the industry. The N100 billion Naira CTG fund put in place by the Federal Government through the Bank of Industry (BOI) in 2010 and the N50 billion Textile Revival Fund from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) represent some of the clear gains in institutional power. These intervention funds have clearly helped to stem the tide of closure in the industry over the last 5 years. In particular, the fund played a key role in bringing back one of the biggest textile mills in Africa, the UNT PLC mill in Kaduna, which closed in 2007 and was reopened in 2010. Several

other factories like Sunflag, Lucky Fibres, and Nichemtex have stabilized operations in the face of daunting economic environment on account of access to intervention funds at single digit interest rate. Other key challenges are also being tackled through representation and consultation with relevant agencies of Government.

3.2.1 Campaigns: The Lessons of History

The union has seen two cycles of crisis; one in the early 1980s under the leadership of Adams Oshiomhole, and the current crisis which began in 2000 under Issa Aremu as General Secretary.

The new union leadership had taken important lessons in NUTGTWN's previous engagement with government in the 1980s and the late 1990s when the industry experienced great shock following impact of the structural adjustment and the liberalization of the textile market. Between 2000 and 2003 NUTGTWN members were active in the successful anti-casualization campaign embarked upon by the NLC. These were important learning opportunities for the NUTGTWN leadership and members. As the industry continued to experience unabated decline, the union began to accentuate its campaign, building on union capabilities and tapping into the network of allies in the private sector and the civil society.

3.2.2 Campaigns and Global Solidarity: Bilateral Exchange with SACTWU

The bilateral exchange between NUTGTWN and Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) had been initiated by Adams Oshiomhole and Ibrahim Patel as General Secretary of NUTGTWN and SACTWU respectively. The final details and implementation were consummated in 2001 by Issa Aremu as General Secretary of NUTGTWN.

The bilateral exchange with SACTWU provided important learning opportunities in several areas of union operations. Since 2001, the union has engaged SACTWU in bilateral relations that include exchange of trade union organizers for a period ranging from three to six months and mutual attendance of officers at conferences and education programmes. The exchange programme had helped to deepen NUTGTWN organizing

processes particularly in the area of documentation and it has helped to sharpen the union advocacy both in content and strategy.

The South African clothing and textile industry was experiencing the damaging impact of smuggling and liberalized textile market at about the same time and the union embarked on a similar campaign in the early 2000s. The exchange of organizers and short visits at conferences helped to deepen mutual learning processes in the areas of organizing and campaigns.

3.2.3 Campaigns and Global Solidarity: IndustriALL's Campaign

NUTGTWN's capacity to seize the momentum of an enlarged IndustriALL Global Union Federation in 2012 has further helped to consolidate union associational power with affiliates of the global union in Nigeria. The thematic campaign to stop precarious work and the campaign around sustainable industrial policy have been further strengthened by union organizing capacity. These campaigns have also helped to deepen union organizing process both in the formal and informal sector as the union is branded as an »organizing union«.

Since 2012, NUTGTWN has become the rallying point for IndustriALL's capacity building and campaign activities in Nigeria and in particular the Stop Precarious work Campaign and the Africa Industrialization Day (AID) campaign. The active participation of Ghana and South Africa and the headquarters of IndustriALL in November 2015 at the African Industrialization Day rally and policy roundtable in Abuja underscore the importance of the day as part of the IndustriALL's Sustainable Industrial Policy goal.

In the process of these campaigns, the union had built robust relationships with the media, civil society organizations, the labour unions in the manufacturing sector and affiliates of the Nigeria Labour Congress and IndustriALL Global Union Federation in Nigeria. External support organizations have also supported policy dialogue series with critical stakeholders including Employers Association, relevant institution of Government like the Department of Customs and Excise, Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), Bank of Industry among others.

The gains of the campaigns are three-fold. Firstly, it constantly draws the attention of policy makers to the challenges confronting the industry. Secondly, it helps to temper members' expectations as they also follow the union campaigns and developments in the sector through the union structure. In the third instance, it has helped to further develop and strengthen union capacity to organize campaigns and engage the policy process. For the secretary of Joint Action Front, »the campaign experiences were enriching in terms of our members' exposure to understanding the workings and challenges in the unions and the need to sustain the solidarity with working people on all fronts.« (Abiodun Aremu interview)

4. Conclusion: Achievements and Future Challenges

The transformation of NUTGTWN is unique as the union remains strong and vibrant despite the monumental decline in membership among factory-employed workers, from over 60,000 in year 2000 to less than 20,000 in 2016. This figure has been tremendously lifted by the addition of self-employed tailors across the states, pushing total membership in the region of 35,000. These combined strengths ensure that the union remains strong in collective bargaining, defence of workers' rights, campaigns and very visible in national and international trade union activism.

As we have seen, the transformation has been driven by a combination of factors including the expanding capabilities to exercise associational and societal power, and using these gained power resources to build institutional power. The union has drawn learning experiences from the way it dealt with membership decline in the 1980s as well as the campaign experiences of SACTWU, NLC and IndustriALL Global Union Federation in recent years.

A major factor in strengthening the union's associational power has been its decision to organize self-employed tailors. Although this has been a challenging task, the growth in membership shows that it is moving forward successfully. The transition from manifest to active membership is especially important for continued success. This can be supported and accelerated through a cocktail of organizing strategies that consider the peculiar needs of the self-employed tailors for protection, access



to credit and capacity and skill development. Union education and training strategy must address both the soft and hard skills requirement of the self-employed tailors.

The union must help to unleash the potential of young tailors and women who are not finding the necessary space within existing structures. It must help to create the youth wing and the women's committee to deepen participation of young tailors and women. The union will also do well to replicate the education and capacity building activities for young workers and women and create structures for these at state level. There is also the need to link the state associations with the relevant agencies of government responsible for vocational training and funding of SMEs. These processes will definitely fast-track the transition from latent membership to manifest and active membership.

At this time there is no doubt that informal sector organizing helps to consolidate existing structures and build the collective and associational power of the union. As the union hopes for revival in the industrial sector, it

must continue to build the associational power resources of the self-employed tailors through creative organizing strategies. As it builds the trade union consciousness of the self-employed tailors through education and capacity building activities, it must also further expand opportunities for inclusion through constitutional changes and recruitment of young and vibrant tailors as informal sector organizers.

Since mid-1990s, the union has given premium to education and capacity development for female members as a way of promoting women's participation in the union. This has been followed with constitutional amendments in 2000, 2008, 2012 and 2016 all aimed at consolidating women's involvement in leadership structures at all levels of the union. With these constitutional changes and increased mobilization and recruitment of female members who are self-employed tailors, there is greater prospect for broadening women participation in the union structure and also expanding the NUTGTWN's prospect for meeting the 40 per cent target for women representation set by IndustriALL.



References

- Andræ, Gunilla / Beckman, Bjorn** (1998): *Union power in the Nigerian Textile Industry. Labour Regime and Adjustment*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; also Somerset, N.J. (1999): Transactions Publ. and Kano: Centre for Research and Documentation.
- Andræ, Gunilla / Beckman, Bjorn** (2010a): »Alliances across the formal-informal divide: South African debates and Nigerian experiences«, in: I. Lindell (ed.): *Africa's Informal Workers: Collective Agency, Alliances and Transnational Organizing*. London/New York: Zed Books, pp. 85–98.
- Andræ, Gunilla / Beckman, Bjorn** (2010b): »Union power and the formal-informal divide«, in: Bergene A. C./Knutsen, H./Endresen, S. (eds.): *Missing Links in Labour Geographies*. Aldershot, Harts: Ashgate, pp. 113–124.
- Aremu, Issa** (2001): *The Social Relevance of Trade Unionism*. Lagos: National Union of Textile Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria.
- CWC** (2000): Minutes of the central working committee (CWC) meeting held on Friday December 15, 2000 in the Adams Oshiomhole Hall of the sub secretariat, Lagos.
- Global Worker No 1** (May 2015): Biannual Magazine of INDUSTRIALL GLOBAL UNION.
- Kriel, Andre** (2002): *Buy Local, Save Jobs, Crush Poverty: The SACTWU experience*. Address by Comrade Andre Kriel, Deputy General Secretary to the 14th Joint Annual Education Conference of NUTGTWN, July 2002.
- Lakemfa, Owei** (1998): *Weaving into History*. Lagos: National Union of Textile Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria.
- NEC** (2008): Report of the National Executive (NEC) to the 9th National Delegates' Conference. Theme: Re-inventing industry and mass decent jobs. March, Abuja.
- NEC** (2012): Report of the National Executive Council to the 10th National delegates conference. March, Asaba, Delta State.
- NEC** (2016): Report of the National Executive Council to the 11th National Delegates Conference March, Kano, Kano state.
- The Textile Worker** (2015): Vol. 11, No. 40, Nov. 2015.
- The Textile Worker** (1998): Vol. 2, No. 14, June 1998.
- The Textile Worker** (1998): Vol. 2, No. 16, Special Anniversary Edition.
- The Textile Worker** (1999): Vol. 2, No.18, October 1999.
- The Textile Worker** (2014): Vol. 7, No. 36, May 2014.
- The Textile Worker** (2010): Vol. 5, No. 27, May 2010.
- The Textile Worker** (2010): Vol. 2, No. 20, August 2000.
- UNIDO / Gherzi Textile** (2009): Technical Report: Textile and Garment Industry Study in Nigeria. Prepared for the Federal Government of Nigeria.
- Interviews** with union officials, civil society activist and Tailors in Lagos, Benin, Makurdi, Birni Kebbi, Kaduna, Ilorin, Lokoja.



About the author

Ismail Bello Adewuni is the Deputy General Secretary of the National Union of Textile Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria (NUTGTWN) in charge of the education and research department of the union. He has over 23 years' experience in union administration, and holds MSc Sociology from the University of Jos and BSc Sociology from the University of Ibadan.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Global Policy and Development
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Mirko Herberg | International Trade Union Policy

Phone: +49-30-269-35-7458 | Fax: +49-30-269-35-9255
www.fes.de/gewerkschaften

To order publications:
Blanka.Balfer@fes.de

Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

About this publication

With Trade Unions in Transformation, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) aims to direct trade union discourse at successful union work. Using the power resources approach, two dozen case studies analyze how unions were able to secure victories. For us, the Global Trade Union Programme of the FES, and our partners, learning from positive experience opens opportunities to reflect about strategic opportunities for unions in a rapidly changing environment. This project thus aims to analyze and strategize union action, including the needed transformation and mobilization of power resources within and outside the organizations.

www.fes.de/gewerkschaften



The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.



ISBN
978-3-95861-903-6