

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

Transforming Transport Unions through Mass Organisation of Informal Workers in Uganda

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- The Amalgamated Transport & General Workers' Union (ATGWU) pioneered a strategy of organizing through the affiliation of mass membership associations of informal minibuss taxi workers and motor cycle (boda-boda) drivers.
- Through the strategic use of their associational, structural, and societal power membership of the union increased dramatically, police harassment declined, internal conflict within the associations was reduced, and the conditions of informal women transport workers improved.
- 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.



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Abstract

This paper analyses the power resources of informal transport workers in Uganda, and the transformation processes of the ATGWU and their newly-affiliated informal workers' associations in organising informal workers. We examined the process of organisation; how strategic choices were made; how the expected increases in power resources were realised; and the results. We also analysed the critical factors behind the success of the strategy, as well as lessons learned and unresolved challenges involved. ATGWU faced an almost complete collapse in membership following the impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s, and the subsequent informalisation of the transport industry. In recent years, ATGWU pioneered a strategy of organising through the affiliation of mass-membership associations of informal workers, notably representing minibus taxi workers and motorcycle taxi («Boda-Boda») riders. The unionisation of informal workers has had a dramatic impact: a reduction in police harassment, substantial gains through collective bargaining, reduced internal conflict within the associations, and improvement of visibility and status for informal women transport workers. The rapid expansion has raised new challenges for the union, particularly in the transition to a large fully integrated formal-informal organisation, the need for reform of democratic process and accountability, and the maintenance of informal-formal workers' solidarity.

Introduction¹

Development of International Trade Union Policies Towards Informal Workers

In recent years, there has been a major shift in international trade union perspectives on informal economy workers. Crudely stated, the dominant union attitudes during the second half of the 20th century were that informal workers were not »real« workers with trade union rights (as they were not in a recognised collective bargaining relationship with employers); that they were impossible to organise; that the informal economy was a »third world problem« inevitably to shrink and disappear as industrialisation spread throughout the world; or that informal workers were a threat to organized labour by undermining hard-fought gains in labour standards.

In many countries, including Uganda, these views were entrenched in labour legislation, where informal workers were not recognised to have fundamental labour rights; were not included in labour market statistics; were not covered by social protection programmes; and/or were not represented or consulted in crucial decisions affecting their livelihoods and working conditions. While some of these views persist, especially among some older trade union leaders, there have been

a number of key developments that have fundamentally shifted union policy, nationally and internationally.

First of all, there has been considerable progress in understanding, defining and documenting the informal economy, particularly through the work of Women in Informal Employment Globalizing & Organizing (WIEGO) and its allies.

Secondly, there are now numerous examples from all over the world that prove that it is possible to organise informal workers. Many of these were initiated or led by women, including domestic workers, home-based workers, waste-recyclers, and street vendors – often supported by WIEGO. Some have built their own international organisations, notably StreetNet International, the global network of street vendors and market traders, and the International Domestic Workers' Federation, launched in 2013 after the successful 2011 adoption of the new ILO Convention for Domestic Workers (Convention 189). There have also been innovative examples of organising among some of the Global Union Federations, notably the International Union of Food Workers among agricultural and fishery workers² and the Building & Woodworkers International among informal, particularly migrant construction workers³.

Furthermore, it is evident that the informal economy is expanding. As the ILO noted in 2002, »contrary to earli-

1. This paper is informed by reports of workshops and seminars conducted as part of the »Informal Transport Workers« project (2013–2016) of the International Transport Workers Union; interviews with union representatives; reports of activities undertaken by the union; and additional participatory research fieldwork, with thanks to FES Uganda.

2. See for example IUF 2008

3. See for example BWI 2016

er predictions, the informal economy has been growing rapidly in almost every corner of the globe, including industrialized countries – it can no longer be considered a temporary or residual phenomenon. The bulk of new employment in recent years, particularly in developing and transition countries, has been in the informal economy« (ILO 2002). It is evident that in large areas of the world, notably Africa and Asia, employment in the transport sector is almost entirely informal.

Finally, most trade unions throughout the world are still facing declining membership and power, despite enormous investment in organising in recent years. In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa the decline in formal employment, especially in the private sector, has reached a critical point where unions are unable to meaningfully represent workers to employers or government, or even face complete collapse. For some unions, the recruitment of large numbers of informal workers has become essential for survival. Despite the difficulties and challenges involved, not least in the retention of membership and the efficient collection of meaningful dues, there is little choice.

The ITF began to discuss the informal economy in the late 1990s, and subsequently commissioned research into organising experience among informal transport workers, based on case studies from Zambia, Benin and the Philippines (Bonner 2006). The ITF Congress in 2010 subsequently noted:

«... While some of these workers have organised into trade unions, there is a need to recognise and to work with other forms of worker organisation which precarious workers have developed among themselves, and to link them to the trade union movement.»

(ITF 2010)

In 2013, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) launched the Informal Transport Workers Project in Africa, Asia and Latin America to improve the capacity of unions to organise and represent informal workers.⁴ The project focused on »mentor« unions in each region, selected on the basis of their skills, experience and policies in working with informal workers, and their capacity to assist other ITF-affiliated unions in their respective regions with training and support. These mentor unions

include the Amalgamated Transport & General Workers Union (ATGWU) in Uganda.

The project, co-financed with the FNV, provided support for ATGWU to develop its own capacity as well as to work with other project participant unions (notably in Kenya and Tanzania) to develop new inclusive union policies and agreements between unions and informal workers' associations; improve practical organising skills among activists in the informal transport sector; and to increase the visibility of women workers in informal transport.

Crisis and Renewal in Uganda

The Collapse of Formal Employment

The ATGWU was the first labour organisation in Uganda. In common with most sub-Saharan African transport unions, its membership and power has suffered almost continual decline in recent decades, particularly through the collapse of state-owned passenger road transport services, and the informalisation of the entire sector.

Crises caused by Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s and the consequent mass retrenchments pushed workers and unions to the wall. The older public transport companies operating large buses collapsed. Informal minibuses (»taxi«) and motor-cycle taxis (»boda-bodas«) became the backbone of public transport. The old bus companies had been the core of ATGWU's organisation, and membership slumped.

By 2006, according to Usher Owere, the ATGWU National Chairman of ATGWU and Chairman of NOTU, the union had a combined membership as low as 2,000, mostly concentrated in the airports. Most workers, or even their leaders, did not understand workers' rights or the role of trade unions, let alone that informal workers had the same rights as workers in the formal economy.

»After structural adjustment programmes and privatisation, Uganda was now a new form of raw capitalism, in which you were either rubbed out or build your own power«, explains Owere⁵. The National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU) was also very weak. Some unions had literally no members; others had dwindled to virtually nothing.

4. See <http://www.informalworkersblog.org/>

5. Interview, 29 July 2016

According to Baligasima Yazidi, the NOTU Programmes Officer, there were attempts to discuss organising, but some union leaders did not understand, or simply did not want to understand, the need to organise outside the formal economy.⁶ According to Yazidi, there is still resistance to organising informal workers in the broader Ugandan trade union movement, particularly among public sector workers and in unions who see themselves as »professional bodies«, such as nurses, teachers etc.

New Thinking

A change of ATGWU leadership in 2006 ushered in a new way of thinking for the union. Among the priorities for the new leadership were: making ATGWU visible to all working people; ensuring that the union was relevant to workers; training the union leadership at all levels; and organising to rebuild the membership. To achieve this, the union needed to ensure that there is »service delivery« to its members: real benefits through collective bargaining, promoting the union as belonging to the workers themselves, and that the union protects them.

ATGWU's change in perception and approach was supported by the union sponsorship of university education for the leadership, which encouraged an understanding of the informal economy. The leaders also attended international seminars, exchange visits and other discussions organised by the ILO, NOTU, StreetNet International and the ITF.

In 2012, Aziz Kiirya was elected as the new General Secretary, committed to regenerating ATGWU through the organisation and representation of informal workers. Whereas the former General Secretary was instrumental in changing the ATGWU constitution to accommodate the informal workers, he was reluctant in deploying union resources to organise in the informal sector. This would explain the slow pace of affiliation in 2006–2012, when only one association was registered: the airport taxi drivers. However, the election of Kiirya heralded a new direction. He secured support of the National Chairman to deploy union resources, both human and financial, towards organising informal economy associations.

6. Interview, 1 August 2016.

Building Power

Process of ATGWU Engagement with Informal Economy Associations

The ATGWU strategy for organising informal economy workers was based on an understanding that these workers are in many cases already organised, not within the trade union movement, but through credit and savings cooperatives, informal self-help groups, community-based organisations, and, most importantly, associations. Some of these associations were already large, well-organised and had substantial resources.

Rather than attempting to recruit individual informal workers into union membership, the ATGWU undertook a sequence of discussions and education events with some of these associations, eventually affiliating each association into the union as a whole. The detailed process was not pre-planned, but rather a sequence of engagements with associations, each leading to contact with the next.

In each case, after initial discussions, the ATGWU »mapped« the association – developing an understanding of the membership, the issues they faced, their internal structure etc. The union and association would then negotiate a memorandum of understanding and affiliation.

The first association to affiliate was the Airport Taxi Operators Association in 2008. The taxi drivers faced major problems, including lack of recognised parking space; chaotic passenger relations; lack of identification cards; and police harassment. Inspired by discussions in an ITF seminar on organising precarious workers held in Lusaka in 2008, ATGWU leaders surveyed the drivers' working conditions, initiated discussions and training, and affiliated the association into the union.

The Long Distance Heavy Truck Drivers Association and the Uganda National Lorry & Transporters' Association affiliated in 2014, but there had been a history of cooperation with ATGWU dating back to 1999. This had been ATGWU's first experience of engaging with informal workers: a by-product of the ITF's longstanding work on HIV/AIDS in East Africa.

The Entebbe Cargo Carriers Association, and Entebbe Casual Labourers Association, influenced by the bene-

fits the airport taxi drivers were gaining through union membership, affiliated in March 2014. This was followed by the Galima Fights HIV/AIDS Initiative, an informal community-based association supporting livelihoods of HIV/AIDS survivors, and the Uganda Bus Drivers & Allied Association, both referred to the union by the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU).

In June 2014, the Nagojje Motor Cycle & Bicycle Transporters Association affiliated on the recommendation of the Uganda National Lorry & Transporters Association. The following month, the Entebbe Stages & Conductors Association (ESCADA) affiliated, representing taxi (minibus) operators and conductors.

In January 2015 a group of mostly women home-based craft workers – the Tukulere Wamu Crafts & Development Association – affiliated. Closely related to Galima, the association runs weekly wholesale market near a major transport intersection in Kampala, selling crafts for the tourist trade.

All of these affiliated associations were relatively small – representing a total combined new membership of 4,473 workers⁷. This dramatically changed with the affiliation of two large and powerful associations of Kampala Operational Taxi Stages Association (KOTSA) and Kampala Metropolitan Boda-Boda Association (KAMBA) in 2015.

Kampala Operational Taxi Stages Association (KOTSA)

KOTSA was the first major association to join, representing 36,000 taxi (minibus) drivers and conductors organised in the Kampala taxi parks or »stages«. The membership of ESCADA, which organises workers at each end of the Entebbe-Kampala road, overlaps with KOTSA, and ESCADA played a major role in introducing the idea of ATGWU membership to KOTSA.

KOTSA faced numerous problems, particularly regarding the law forbidding gatherings of more than ten people without permission *unless they were a union*. The 2013

Public Order Management Act gave the Inspector General of Police the power »to regulate the conduct of all public meetings in accordance with the law«, but trade unions were explicitly exempt.

The process of affiliating KOTSA led to running battles between ATGWU and the police. At one time police in effect occupied the ATGWU compound and expelled the workers. This police action was firmly resisted by ATGWU leaders, declaring that organising the taxi drivers was a bona fide trade union activity, as permitted by law. ATGWU immediately announced to the media that it was calling a strike in protest against the police closure of its offices, with the threat of shutting down the airport and – with KOTSA membership on the streets – bringing Kampala to a standstill.

The Police Inspector General responded by calling a meeting with ATGWU leaders. At the same time, the ITF had written to President Museveni in protest at the police action. Prompted by Museveni, fearing an escalation of action by ATGWU and KOTSA, supported by the ITF, the Inspector General backed down. He publicly apologised, the union agreed to call off the strike and KOTSA affiliated to the union.

The confrontation and subsequent victory proved to be a pivotal moment in the organisation of informal workers for ATGWU. The whole event was widely publicised in the media, and had an enormous impact on the morale and confidence among informal association members. It was not only a victory against police interference in the business of the associations, but against the day-to-day police harassment and extortion suffered by informal transport workers.

It was also widely believed to be a victory against political interference. Union and association leaders are convinced that the police action was not motivated by a misunderstanding of the law, but were acting on behalf of the rival association affiliated to Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU).

Kampala Metropolitan Boda-Boda Association (KAMBA)

KAMBA, representing 38,000 boda-boda (motorcycle taxi) riders, joined in September 2015. They had also

7. Throughout this paper, unless otherwise stated, membership figures of associations are those included in the memoranda of understanding between each association and ATGWU signed at the point of affiliation. This is to avoid confusion between various estimates of membership, depending on the criteria used (numbers of paying members, registered members, numbers of workers in workplaces managed by the association etc.).

been suffering similar police harassment and interference. ATGWU's victory in enabling KOTSA to gather and hold elections without police harassment strengthened KAMBA's interest in joining.

KAMBA was launched in January 2014, and had become a significant organisation with a wide range of services for their members. KAMBA had first started discussions with ATGWU in 2014 at a meeting to discuss a threatened strike by boda-boda riders⁸. The ATGWU General Secretary attended and presented the benefits of joining the union to defend KAMBA members' rights. He explained that the proposed strike was illegal unless called by a registered trade union. This was followed by a press conference at the ATGWU offices at which the strike was called off. The press conference and subsequent media coverage did much to galvanise support and boost membership for KAMBA which further strengthened the case for affiliation.

Informal Sector Committee

In February 2015, the union established the ATGWU Informal Sector⁹ Committee, composed of the Chairs and Secretaries of all the affiliated associations. The Committee holds monthly meetings hosted by all the affiliates in rotation. This worked very well, enabling all the member organisations to get to know one another, engaging members, not just the leadership.

Impact

»100 % increase in power for everyone«

The ATGWU Informal Sector Committee unanimously believes that they have seen a »100 % increase in power for everyone« as a result of affiliating to ATGWU¹⁰.

Most importantly, there has been the *reduction in police harassment*, particularly after the confrontation over

8. Focus group discussion with ATGWU Informal Sector Committee. 30 July 2016.

9. Since the ILO discussions of 2002, the term »informal sector« has been generally replaced by »informal economy«, reflecting the fact that informality is not a sector in itself, but that the informal economy is to be found in virtually all employment sectors.

10. Focus group discussion with ATGWU Informal Sector Committee. 30 July 2016.

the KOTSA elections. The Entebbe Cargo Handlers Association explains that they no longer fear the police, and harassment stopped »simply the result of wearing ATGWU t-shirts«. KAMBA has noted a sharp decline in the harassment of boda-boda riders since the statement by the Police Inspector General.

There have also been substantial *gains through collective bargaining* with ATGWU support. The airport taxi drivers engaged in collective bargaining with the airport management (the Civil Aviation Authority), which led to standardised branding for the taxis, an office and sales counter for the association in the arrivals hall, a properly organised parking and rest area, uniforms and identity cards, and a substantial reduction in the number of instances of police harassment and extortion.

The Tukulere Wamu market traders were devastated when their market was demolished by the authorities. The ATGWU intervened, and engaged Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) in negotiation. The demolition order was rescinded and the market re-established.

ATGWU's *training* has been very effective in boosting confidence, especially in the management of associations with regard to the role and rotation of leadership and conducting meetings. According to the Informal Sector Committee, there is a noticeable difference between people who have and who have not attended training.

Committee members believe that trusted and experienced ATGWU staff and leaders have been able to provide valuable advice and support to strengthen internal democratic procedures and rules, which has *reduced internal conflict* in the associations and greatly helped to eliminate vote-rigging and other election irregularities.

Union membership cards and particularly ITF international identity cards have proved to be very valuable. The members of both the Long-Distance Heavy Truck Drivers Association and the Airport Taxi Operators Association have benefited greatly from the help of ITF-affiliated unions when needing assistance while abroad as the result of the ITF ID cards. Taxis are frequently hired from Entebbe airport to travel across borders into neighbouring countries.

According to David Musoke, Chair of the Informal Sector Committee, the main overall benefit of being affili-

ated to the ATGWU is the *support of union leaders with strong connections* and reputations. To be part of the ATGWU was to be part of an »honourable name«. In 2014, his association had a serious problem with the Executive Director of the KCCA who was behaving »very arrogantly« towards the drivers, and refused to negotiate. The ATGWU opened the door to negotiations, providing »respect and access«.

The Entebbe Cargo Handlers Association recognises that the ATGWU has given them »a bigger voice with the government and authorities«. KOTSA explained that President Museveni has tried to persuade them to leave ATGWU, that it was causing the government »inconvenience«. Previously the President had refused to recognise them.

The Impact of Union Affiliation on Women Workers

At an early stage of the ITF project, ATGWU encouraged women's committees to be established in each of the newly-affiliated associations, and founded an ATGWU Informal Sector Women's Committee to support mapping and organising and to organise activities to promote the visibility of women in informal transport. These committees have become important channels for strengthening the visibility and encouraging the participation of women.

The number of women working in »core« transport industry jobs remains small, but it is growing. The Kampala Operational Taxi Stages Association (KOTSA) counts only 45 women conductors, 13 drivers, 60 »call-girls«¹¹ and 20 ancillary workers out of a total membership of approximately 36,000. The Entebbe Airport Taxi Association, with a membership of 250, has only two women members – one a secretary and one a driver. The Kampala Metropolitan Boda-Boda Association (KAMBA) has only 20–30 women riders out of a membership of 38,000.

There are, however, many more women working in and around the major transport hubs, among whom ATGWU is organising. Some of the major issues faced by the wom-

en workers are the same as other informal workers more generally throughout the world – low pay, long hours, dangerous and unhealthy working conditions and lack of social protection, but the most important issues identified by the women in all the countries where mapping was undertaken was violence, sexual harassment and intimidation by men.

Vehicle owners, and some leaders of the associations themselves, are major barriers to addressing and ending the violence and discrimination, but committee members believe that biggest barrier is the lack of education among the women, particularly the lack of awareness of their rights and fear of the police. This is the most important task for the Informal Sector Women's Committee.

The ATGWU engaged the women in education workshops as well as more informal education work on the streets, in the major transport hubs and within the union itself which, according to the women, is being effective in changing attitudes among the men, have given women more confidence »changed their mind-set«. The women feel more confident in describing their experiences, and the men have become more supportive.

On 29 March 2016, the committee organised a convoy of twelve (minibus) taxis on a round trip along one of the major taxi routes from Kampala to Entebbe, a distance of 45 km. The objective was to demonstrate that women can and do work in the taxi industry, encourage other women to do so, show that they can run taxis on equal terms with men, and demand equal rights.

The event reached the news headlines and created considerable media attention, with well-known media personalities and TV crews accompanying the women's taxis on the Entebbe trip. Women watching the news were immediately inspired to phone the union, wanting to join.

Nevertheless, the informal transport industry in Uganda is huge. There are estimated to be more than 250,000 boda-boda drivers in Kampala alone. There are more than 50,000 taxis (minibuses), each of them providing work for an entire micro-economy of drivers, conductors, call boys/girls, mechanics, and tyre-fitters, cleaners, ticketing clerks, painters, sound system engineers, guards and others. In this context, the impact of the

11. »Call-girls« and »Call-boys« are people informally employed in minibus taxi and bus terminals as despatchers, paid by drivers to fill vehicles with passengers as quickly as possible.

ATGWU's Informal Women's Committee so far is to be regarded as having only just scratched the surface.

Yet the ATGWU Informal Sector Committee (comprising both men and women) points out that KAMBA's General Secretary is now a woman; that every one of KAMBA's five offices is run by a woman; that there are increasing numbers of women working as conductors; and the women leaders who have emerged over the last three years are now very important role-models for women.

Implications and Challenges

The extraordinary rapid expansion in membership and the revitalisation of ATGWU into a union that is developing significant power in the Ugandan transport industry is remarkable. Yet it presents serious new challenges for ATGWU.

Equal Status for Formal and Informal Workers

There is general agreement between the leaders of both ATGWU itself and of the newly-affiliated associations that the current constitutional, governance and management arrangements need to be reformed. The informal workers need to have the same rights and responsibilities as their formal economy counterparts to ensure full participation in the trade union movement.

To that end, ATGWU has agreed in principle that there should be a transition towards full individual ATGWU membership of affiliated association members, with equal democratic rights and responsibilities to those of formal economy workers¹². This includes the payment of individual dues by the informal workers after thorough discussions on the amount and mode of payment.

If practical arrangements for payment could be agreed, presumably through the associations, and all the approximately 57,523 members of all currently-affiliated associations paid, this would theoretically generate new income of UGX 690 million, the equivalent of about USD 205,000 (2015). This compares with the estimated total of association affiliation fees payable

in 2015 of UGX 7,650,000 (USD 2,250)¹³. Even if it proved impossible to efficiently collect payments from all members, it would still mean a huge increase in income for ATGWU.

On the other hand, as the ATGWU chairman acknowledges¹⁴, the increase in affiliations and mass membership creates an enormous demand for »service delivery« which would require major changes in the number of staff members and elected officials and their responsibilities.

At present, the informal workers' associations have one representative on the National Executive Board, an arrangement agreed after the first association affiliated, but this is not reflected in the constitution and the affiliated associations have not undertaken a formal election process to determine their representative since the original decision.

Full members of ATGWU are constitutionally obliged to pay 2 percent of their salary in union dues. This would of course be extremely complicated for informal workers, most of whose income varies considerably from day to day or year to year, and many are highly transient, both in terms of workplace and in residential address. Additionally, few have bank accounts, although the rapid expansion of mobile phone transfers (Mobile Money) in Uganda may offer new solutions to dues-collection.

Formal-Informal Solidarity

Since the formation of the ATGWU Informal Sector Committee there has been remarkably strong solidarity between the associations, but it was recognised that there was a need to bring informal and formal members of ATGWU together to develop solidarity across the formal-informal divide¹⁵.

The ATGWU team of staff and elected section secretaries recognised that very few of the union's shop stewards in formal workplaces are aware of or understand

12. Interview with ATGWU General Secretary, 29 February 2016.

13. As reported to Informal Sector Committee »retreat« meeting, December 2015. This are the figures agreed by the associations, but not necessarily paid.

14. Interview with ATGWU Chairman, 29 July 2016.

15. Informal Sector Committee focus group discussion, 30 July 2016.

the strategy to organise in the informal transport industry¹⁶. Some of the »formal« union leaders were thought to be resistant, as they feared that large numbers of new members from the informal economy would pose a major threat to their elected positions. Some, including some National Executive Board members, believed that there is far too much emphasis on the informal economy, and that the main formal workplaces were being neglected, despite making a major contribution to the union's income. There had been very few training opportunities for »formal« workplace representatives and therefore a very low existing understanding of trade unionism.

The union has a long-standing National Women's Committee, elected at each of the union's Congress every five years. The women elected to this committee are all from the »formal« transport industry – primarily in aviation. There had been little contact between the »formal« and »informal« women's committees, but according to the informal women, there was potential for solidarity and mutual support and a need to build mutual understanding.

The problem had been exacerbated by lack of regular meetings of ATGWU's key constitutional bodies, where representatives of the formal economy workers would normally discuss policy and strategy. This meant that there has been little or no opportunity to develop a dialogue, encourage mutual respect or develop solidarity between the formal and informal committees. ATGWU staff recognised the problem as well as the need to bring the two committees together and develop a joint education programme.

It was also recognised that many of the young leaders and activists in the informal associations are highly educated and are likely to demand far greater accountability and transparency in the union's management.

According to the members of the Informal Sector Committee, the creation of a very big union will attract a great deal of interest – and potentially interference – from the political parties, especially from the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) and the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), which could provoke major internal divisions within ATGWU.

16. Focus group discussion, 1 August 2016.

Current ATGWU leaders support a variety of parties including the NRM, FDC, and a variety of smaller groupings, and there is an implied agreement that no-one attempts to use the union as a party-political platform. An issue emerges in the fact that informal transport workers and their associations play a very prominent campaigning role in Ugandan elections, particularly the boda-boda riders (albeit very frequently for financial incentives).

According to Baligasima Yazidi from NOTU, the government is very unhappy at the affiliation of KOTSA and KAMBA to ATGWU, and thus their exemption from the provisions of the 2013 Public Order Act that limits the right to assembly. From NOTU's perspective the government always attempts to divide and rule the trade union movement, citing the experience after 2003, when they supported the establishment of the rival Central Organisation of Free Trade Unions (COFTU), and fifteen »duplicate« unions. He believes that there is a strong possibility that the government may now try to split the ATGWU, inciting and exploiting internal divisions¹⁷.

Transition to a Fully Integrated Union

In November 2016, partly due to discussions held as part of the research leading to this paper, the ATGWU Chair and General Secretary proposed that leaders from ATGWU and its affiliated associations meet in a »retreat« meeting to discuss the future development of ATGWU and to build mutual trust and understanding across the group. More specifically, the retreat was to consider ideas for a transition process from current affiliation arrangements to integration of informal workers into ATGWU as full members with equal rights and obligations to those in the formal economy. These discussions were held in the context of the forthcoming ATGWU 2017 Quinquennial Delegates Conference (QDC), where delegates are to have the opportunity to consider proposals for constitutional reform and a strategic plan for 2017–2022.

The three-day retreat was attended by thirty-nine union and association leaders, including members of the ATGWU's National Executive Board and Informal Sector Committee.

17. Interview with Baligasima Yazidi, 1 August 2016.

The retreat had no formal decision-making power, but provided a democratic space for open discussion¹⁸. The recommendations and conclusions emerging from the retreat were those of the retreat participants themselves, designed to be presented to the governing bodies and relevant committees of ATGWU and the affiliated associations for consideration and decision.

At the conclusion of the retreat, participants made several recommendations. These include options for proposals for amendments to the ATGWU Constitution and the 2017–2022 Strategic Plan. Recommendations included measures to achieve full integration of informal workers; strengthened democratic governance – particularly for financial accountability; a review of the ATGWU constitution; improved communications; expanded engagement of women; and priorities for union education (Spooner 2016b).

Most importantly, the retreat meeting was remarkably successful in building solidarity and trust between the participants, and there was a clear sense that it was a historic moment in the creation of a new and powerful integrated union.

The Role of the ITF and Implications

The broad idea of building alliances and working with informal economy associations had been circulating in the ITF for some time. Indeed, the 2010 Congress document noted that:

«... While some of these workers have organised into trade unions, there is a need to recognise and to work with other forms of worker organisation which precarious workers have developed among themselves, and to link them to the trade union movement.»

(ITF 2010)

Nevertheless, it could not be said that the transformation of ATGWU was due to ITF strategy. Arguably, it is more likely that the ATGWU's experience, along with that of the other »mentor unions« in the project, is having an important impact on ITF's own strategic thinking. The original shift in strategy by the ATGWU in 2012 was the

result of a combination of influences – university courses attended by senior officials; participation in debates and discussions on the informal economy at the ILO, ITUC and other international trade union meetings and seminars; the development policies of major donor agencies; contacts with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), StreetNet International, Global Labour Institute (GLI) and other NGOs working on the informal economy; and informal discussions with others in the ITF Africa Region, for whom the challenge of informal work was high priority.

The informal workers project was an initiative of the ITF's Education Department, with the majority of costs covered by a grant from FNV Mondiaal. Although under the management of an ITF steering committee, with representation from the Inland Transport Department, the Women's Department and the General Secretary's Office, it was not in the mainstream of priority strategic campaigns. Aside from the ITF's Africa Regional Office, the project as a whole and the achievements of ATGWU in particular were to some extent »under the radar«.

This significantly changed in December 2016, when ATGWU representatives, along with other mentor unions and the GLI, presented the outcomes of the project to a global conference of the Road and Rail Sections of the ITF held in Brussels. This was the first opportunity many of the senior elected representatives and officers of the ITF had to hear directly from the unions concerned and appreciate the success of the organising model. For some of the unions present from the »Global North« who face the growth of precarious employment and the »gig economy« in transport, there was recognition that these strategies were of considerable potential importance across the whole of the ITF.

The experience of the ATGWU is also important in addressing the ITF's concerns on the future sustainability of unions in developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

By rebuilding a mass organisation of transport workers through the affiliation of informal workers' associations, ATGWU is poised to become financially fully self-sustainable. The associations have systems in place for the collection of membership dues which are clearly sustainable, requiring no external support for them to

18. The meeting was facilitated by Dave Spooner, GLI at the request of ATGWU.

function.¹⁹ If this model could be replicated elsewhere, it would have very positive consequences for the ITF itself.

Mac Urata, ITF Section Secretary for Inland Transport over the duration of the project, thinks that mass membership may have a huge impact in the near future:

»It may be too early to say, but ATGWU is the best model we have in presenting the case for mass membership of informal transport workers. Clearly there is a need for ATGWU to review its structures, activities and services, but if income is generated, there is a good chance of creating a real and sustainable trade union of informal workers. The union has a long and respected history, both regionally and internationally. It cannot get better than this.«²⁰

Is the Uganda Organising Model Replicable?

Those in the ITF who have been directly involved in the project or have been able to gain first-hand experience of working with ATGWU and the informal workers' associations believe so – at least potentially. This was the view echoed by the delegates at the ITF Road and Rail conference.

In common with other GUFs, the ITF faces a continual dilemma of how to be democratically inclusive of all affiliated unions, regardless of size or resources, yet avoid the enormous expense of servicing the many small and weak unions who cannot afford more than a token financial contribution. The multi-layered democratic structure of the ITF, with regional, sectoral, youth and women's structures, includes numerous international committees and conferences, as well as the quadrennial Congress itself. The cost of ITF subsidy for the participation of unions with few resources far outweighs the income they generate, and the outcomes of these meetings, such as practical organising initiatives and coordination of activity, are frequently of questionable value. If the affiliation and integration of mass-membership informal associations into ITF unions can be extended and maintained, it would be a major step forward towards the sustainability of the ITF as a whole in developing countries.

19. As the result of ATGWU experience, the ITF is currently assessing the feasibility of developing mobile banking applications for use in countries such as Uganda and Kenya, which would simplify the task considerably.

20. Mac Urata interview, 1 Sept 2016.

Yet there is a remaining question of how far the affiliation of the large associations was influenced by the peculiarities of Ugandan law. The ATGWU was able to offer the associations protection from police interference and harassment under the 2013 Public Order Management Act.

Nevertheless, the »ATGWU model« has already been successfully adopted and adapted by other unions involved in the ITF project, particularly elsewhere in East and West Africa.

Power Resources

How are power resources being brought into play in the unfolding transformation of ATGWU into a union with mass membership among informal transport workers? How does this contribute to the broader debate on the power resources approach in trade union transformation (Schmalz/Dörre 2016)? And how far do ATGWU and its affiliated associations have the capability to recognise and use power resources strategically? (FES 2016).

The Informal Transport Associations

It is evident that informal transport workers, especially in urban passenger transport, have considerable *structural power*, based on their ability to cause major disruption in towns and cities. This is largely through *workplace bargaining power*, where the workplaces are the taxi parks, boda-boda stages, and the streets where they operate. They can and do take industrial action and withdraw their labour, but not normally directly against employers, but rather against government and other public bodies that influence or control their day-to-day livelihoods and working conditions. They obviously also have *circulation power*, the ability to cause major disruption to a city simply by simply bringing traffic to a standstill (not difficult in Kampala!) through mass mobilisation of taxis and boda-boda. This is also a form of *multiplicative power* – »disrupting the ability of other workers to perform their wage-earning work and as such influences other sectors of the economy« (Cepok 2013).

The second form of structural power, *market bargaining power*, is only available to a relatively small number of workers, mostly men, in the informal transport econo-

my. The Ugandan economy is far from a tight labour market, few workers possess »rare qualifications and skills demanded by employers« (Silver 2003), and unemployment, here meaning lack of employment in the formal economy, is endemic.

Nevertheless, there are discernible hierarchies between the informal workers and their formal economy (and unionised) counterparts which, as Schmalz and Dörre suggest, »... harbour the risk of stripping workers and their sense of solidarity for each other. Such divides become clear in particular in the informal sector in the Global South«. This was one of the central questions addressed in the retreat meeting in November 2016. It was undoubtedly true that prior to the meeting, there were some tensions between formal and informal workers' representatives, particularly among the formal workforce where they had no experience of directly engaging with informal association leaders. Yet these tensions appeared to be reducing as the formal and informal leaders were able to grasp the potential power and mutual advantages of solidarity within a large integrated union. Whether this will be reflected among the rank and file members remains to be seen.

Such hierarchies are also to be found *within* the informal economy. Analysis of employment relationships between different occupations reveals distinct hierarchies within the informal transport industry. Those with skills (e.g. drivers) or ownership of vehicles have a degree of market bargaining power, potentially exercised to maintain their position against others (e.g. conductors) who may aspire to become drivers or vehicle owners. Despatchers may aspire to become conductors, and so on. Those with more market bargaining power are almost certainly men, with women facing segregation or discrimination, and far more likely to be found in the most low-paid, low status and most precarious occupations.

Some Ugandan informal transport workers have developed considerable *associational power*, notably workers in the taxi/minibus terminals (KOTSA) and boda-boda riders (KAMBA), with a combined membership of perhaps 70,000 workers (see above), probably more than the combined membership of the National Organisation of Trade Unions. In those terminals where KOTSA has control, their workplace bargaining power is undeniable.

By comparison with the trade unions, these associations have significant infrastructural resources, both money and human resources. Contrary to stereotypes, many of the workers – especially in KAMBA – are highly educated, including graduates, with strong organisational and entrepreneurial skills, capable of sustaining organisational efficiency. There appears to be strong and active membership participation and internal cohesion.

Until affiliation with the union however, the informal associations had very weak or non-existent *institutional power*. They were not formally recognised by local or national governments, nor were they included in tripartite structures or processes.

There is also little indication of *societal power*. In general, taxi workers and boda-boda riders are unpopular in much of the media and public opinion, sometimes regarded as violent, dangerous, rude and responsible for the poor state of urban transport, etc. KAMBA and KOTSA have a mixed reputation, with some regarding the formation of KAMBA and KOTSA as good initiatives, but have no apparent serious cooperation with broader social movements, NGOs etc. Their discursive power or ability to effectively intervene in public debate is limited.

The *capabilities* of informal transport workers »to recognise and use power resources strategically«, (Lévesque/Murray 2010), is limited. The capabilities around intermediating, framing and articulating are not well developed, partly due to the relatively short histories of the main associations (notably KAMBA and KOTSA), although they have demonstrable learning capability and organisational flexibility.

ATGWU

Prior to the affiliation of informal associations, ATGWU had considerable *structural power*, but limited to small numbers of workplaces. By far the most important source of workplace bargaining, circulation and multiplicative power is Entebbe Airport and the Civil Aviation Authority, which is well-organised with high union density – including the Airport Taxi Association, Entebbe Air Cargo Carriers Association and Entebbe Casual Labourers Association. This is ATGWU's core formal economy power-base and, as noted above, remains crucial lever-

age in negotiations with government in securing trade union rights for informal workers.

Numerically, outside of the aviation and security industries, ATGWU had virtually no *associational power*. It retains some infrastructural resources, with a relatively stable but limited income from its formal economy dues-paying membership, and a small team of experienced and educated organisers and support staff. Organisational efficiency, membership participation and internal cohesion are weak, with democratic and constitutional structures and procedures in need of urgent reform.

ATGWU does however continue to hold considerable *institutional power*. It has formal recognition and bargaining arrangements with the government and employers. The ATGWU leadership is able to intervene with the Ugandan political system, up to and including the State House. This proved crucial in overcoming police harassment in the process of the associations' affiliation.

The union has some limited *societal power*. It enjoys a certain amount of public respect and access to a reasonably sympathetic media, although overall public perception of the trade union movement as an important societal force is negligible. ATGWU developed some important alliances and forms of cooperation through its HIV/AIDS programmes, and respect for its work in various related technical working groups. It also has a growing reputation for its work around the environment and climate change, especially in the broader Ugandan labour movement.

ATGWU has strong *capabilities* in intermediating, framing and articulating. The leadership and staff have skills and experience in developing a collective interest from

conflicting demands; framing the discourse and formulating new strategies; and articulating analysis and strategy locally, nationally and internationally.

ATGWU has certainly demonstrated the ability to learn, both from understanding its own history and from interaction with national, regional and international trade unions, academic institutions and support organisations.

ATGWU's intermediating capabilities were clearly demonstrated in the »retreat« meeting in November 2016, which had a major impact on the development of a new sense of informal-formal solidarity and common purpose – that a large fully-integrated union could have substantial societal, economic and political power in Uganda. These capabilities will be much needed in the coming months to consolidate this through the period of expansion and transition towards constitutional and structural reform.

Power Resources in the Transformation of ATGWU

The process of transformation of ATGWU through the affiliation of a mass membership of informal transport workers can be summarised as a union with declining associational power, but with residual structural and institutional power, combines with informal workers' associations possessing considerable associational and structural power, but with no access to institutional power. Both benefit and the result is a union transformed into a large and potentially very powerful organisation uniting informal and formal economy workers.

Both previously had limited societal power, but with the combined capabilities, this perhaps now becomes possible if the necessary transition process is successful.



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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.

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