

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a pattern that roughly follows the shape of a map of Europe and the Mediterranean region.

The Transformation of Organised Labour

Mobilising Power Resources to Confront 21st Century Capitalism

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- Trade unions in the Global South and North are innovating and making strategic choices to respond to a changing world of work.
- By organising the »unorganisable«, bringing together local and global struggles, building alliances and practicing new forms of participation, trade unions develop new or use existing power resources to successfully advance workers' interests.
- This study presents the main findings of 26 case studies of the »Trade Unions in Transformation« project – providing insights to understand and enhance union power.



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1. Introduction: Building Innovative Strategies for the 21st Century

At the beginning of the 21st century, organised labour is facing new challenges as profound changes in the world of labour have taken place. Major socio-economic trends such as precarisation, informalisation, globalisation and digitalisation of work have contributed to a weakening of trade unions in most developed countries and also many parts of the Global South. Thus, for a long time it was a truism that organised labour was in decline. This pessimistic assessment of the development of the labour movement was substantiated by a number of indicators such as shrinking membership numbers, the erosion of collective agreements and more generally, a fragmentation of the workforce and a decline in societal and political influence.

However, this discourse of a general decline of organised labour has been challenged by a number of examples of trade union revitalisation in both the Global North and the Global South. Since the early 2000s, a number of studies have shown that organised labour is able to cope with the challenges of a globalised and flexible economy with innovative organisational and organising strategies. The project *Trade Unions in Transformation* (TUIT) presents 26 analytical case studies of such new approaches. These cases of successful union revitalisation range from organisations such as the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) and Uganda's oldest union, the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU) to transnational union networks organising the Latin American airline LATAM and the largest industrial union of the Western world, the IG Metall, Germany. Consequently, there is a necessity to re-examine the question of organisation by identifying new actors, innovative forms of organisation and organising strategies in the global economy. In other words, unions are not at the mercy of economic interests pushing for less regulation, more flexibility and less union influence. Unions are collective actors capable of strategic choice in responding to new challenges and changing contexts. Trade unions can successfully defend their interests by questioning conventional paths of action and by pursuing new strategies.

The project »Trade Unions in Transformation«¹, initiated by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, identifies such new

strategies of union renewal in different countries and economic sectors. In most of the case studies a deep crisis of the organisation and/or a profound change of context triggered union renewal. After going through an organisational crisis, actors within the union, seeking ways to recover, reflected upon this situation and began to test new strategies and methods such as organising and campaigning or to create new organisational forms. This process of strategic adaptation usually sparked internal debates and struggles, as it was often contested. In our case studies, the development of new strategies generally culminated in successes, which, once recognised, usually spread throughout the organisation and contributed to developing a new repertoire of action. Union renewal is thus built on a difficult trial-and-error process of organisational learning, which can take a long time. And in the end, as some of the cases show, there is no guarantee of success or sustainability.

In what follows, we present five major challenges to trade union work in the 21st century and how unions successfully coped with these challenges, using them as an impetus for strategic change within their own organisations. We highlight innovative strategies of union renewal by referring to the project case studies. The five challenges we address are the precarisation and informalisation of work (section 2); globalisation (section 3); flexibilisation and digitalisation of the economy (section 4); social and political alliances (section 5) and the more overarching topic of participation – an elemental factor found in most of the project cases –, including women's empowerment (section 6).

All of the case study authors, both researchers and trade unionists, used the *power resources approach* (PRA) as their analytical framework to theorise and reflect upon these challenges (for a brief explanation of the PRA see the box, p. 4)². In the concluding section some basic insights common to all the cases are presented.

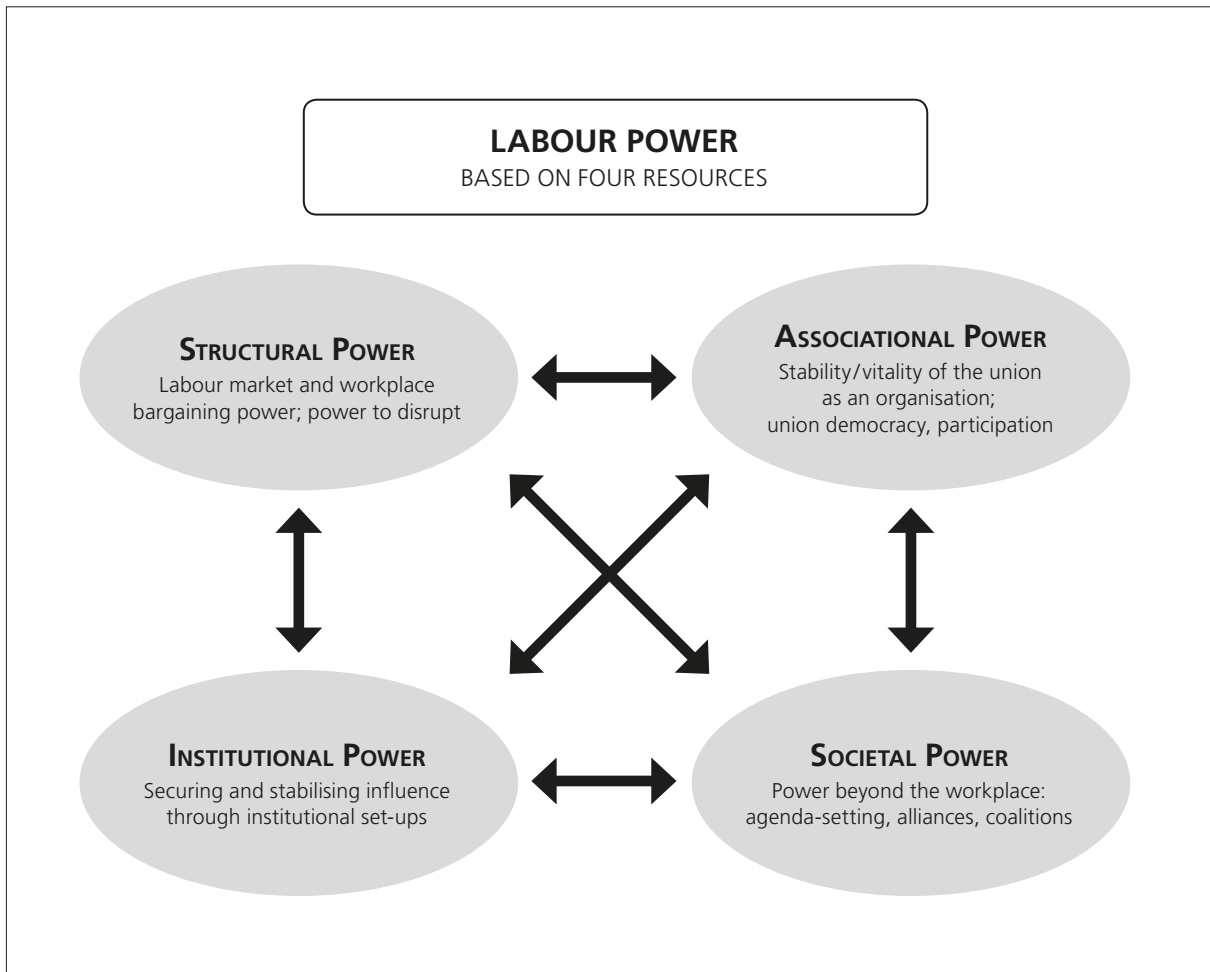
2. Organising the »Unorganisable«: Precarisation and Informalisation Contested

Precarity as a function of unfettered 21st century capitalism has become a key feature of the condition of

1. See the TUIT website <https://www.fes.de/lnk/transform>. All case studies referred to in this paper are available on the TUIT website.

2. For detailed explanations of the PRA see: Schmalz and Dörre 2018, Schmalz et al. 2018; See also Wright 2001, Silver 2003; Dörre et al. 2009; Brookes 2015; Webster 2015, and the TUIT website <https://www.fes.de/lnk/transform>.

Figure 1: The Power Resources Approach



the working class in the global North and South (Castel 1995, Kalleberg et al. 2000, Standing 2011, Lee and Kofman 2012). For many, this process of precarisation has meant that their jobs have become more and more uncertain, unstable and insecure because of policies and power relationships that shift risks from businesses, employers and governments to workers with limited or no social benefits and statutory entitlements. Externalisation and more specifically outsourcing, sub-contracting and agency work – thus, precarisation – have become the dominant strategies in global manufacturing and production. The once standard employment relationship in the Global North characterised by full-time, uninterrupted employment with a clearly defined employer, a stable workplace and access to social security is today the exception rather than the norm in most parts of the world (Standing 2011; Scully 2016).

Many other workers have been forced by this process into the informal economy in order to make a living. Others exist in the informal economy because they never had access to formal wage employment. In many countries, informal is the normal (see Komlosy 2018). According to recent estimates, about two thirds of all non-agricultural workers are employed informally and the informal sector contributes a fourth to a half of global GDP (Charmes 2016). Consequently, although formalisation – i.e. providing standards-based regular employment contracts – and promoting decent work as a middle to long-term strategy to combat both informalisation and precarity should be the primary goal, improvement of working and living conditions for many people for whom formalisation might not be achievable – or at least not in the near future – is of utmost importance.

The omnipresence of workers' insecurity is ultimately the result of an imbalance in power relations in favour of private capital (Arnold and Bongiovi, 2013: 295f). This ›new work paradigm‹ is more powerful than ever before and unions, in the global North as well as the South, are still struggling to find appropriate counter-strategies. With increasing precarisation and »with the growing informalisation of work, traditional forms of trade union organisation are proving inadequate, leading to a growing representational gap« (Webster, Britwum, and Bhowmik, 2017: 2; for Europe see: Castel and Dörre 2009). However, several case studies of the TUiT project provide new insights to this dilemma: For one, they clearly show that informal workers are not unorganised, but the forms of organisation differ from what is often called ›traditional‹ or ›conventional‹ unionism. Many workers in precarious employment and almost all in the informal economy are not recognised as workers, neither within the labour laws of their respective countries (most informal workers fall outside the legal frameworks), nor by their societies or the established labour movement. Against all odds, ›new‹ unions, associations and grassroots organisations have emerged in many regions of the world³, partly in response to the lack of interest from ›traditional‹ unions to re-adjust their strategies, structures and policies to represent and integrate the needs and interests of workers precariously employed and/or in the informal economy. It is those new forms of workers' organisations of varying origins – new forms of collective solidarity – that are increasingly learning to assess where the power of informal and precarious workers resides. New forms of organising and finally new forms of organisations are in the making in many parts of the world but especially in the Global South, organisations which differ from traditional trade unions.

Nevertheless, our case studies from South Korea, Malaysia, Nigeria, Uganda and India also show very clearly the ability of so-called ›traditional‹ unions making strategic choices to organise precarious and informal economy workers. Drawing on these cases, the TUiT project provides evidence that unions are willing to, capable of and sometimes even forced to make strategic choices to address and overcome the divide between formal and informal economy by organising precarious workers, and thus enhancing their own legitimacy.

3. One example of this development can be found in a case study from our project on street vendors in India. Another example are the workers' centers in the USA (Cordero-Guzmán, 2015).

The Samsung Electronic Service Workers Union, a very young affiliate of the Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU), strengthened the associational power of precarious workers (outsourced service engineers) by building alliances with various social and political groups, including workers centres, labour rights advocates groups, and members from progressive parties (societal power). In Malaysia, a rather ›old-fashioned‹ trade union federation reached out to migrant domestic workers to combat their precarity and build associational power. In India, the National Association of Street Vendors NASVI, an umbrella organisation with many trade unions amongst its affiliates, showcases the power of ›new forms of organising‹, using innovative strategies of collective action to enhance the associational and societal power of the street vendors by pooling the limited associational power of small associations in one large organisation. Both the Ugandan transport union ATGWU and the Nigerian Textile Workers Union (NUTGTWN) restructured themselves and implemented new and innovative strategies to overcome the limitations and the image of a ›traditional‹ union and reach out to informal workers: in Uganda to informal transport workers such as minibus taxi, bicycle taxi and boda-boda drivers, and in Nigeria to own-account tailors in the informal economy. The union's strategies for organising these workers necessarily had to recognise that workers had already developed their own informal or semi-formal forms of organisation of mutual support.

Trade unions and informal workers organisations are developing and tapping into their own (new or unused) sources of power. They are learning to mobilise their structural power, disrupting the public order to raise awareness about their aims. And they are exercising their societal power to influence the overall political discourse. In many cases they are combining these approaches with strategies toward stabilising their political and social roles through institutional power, for example by gaining legal recognition for informal workers under existing labour laws. Trade unions have also proven to be able to take the strategic decision to organise the precarious and informal sector. Through such organisational changes they have developed new associational power resources. The TUiT project also sheds some light on the question of whether trade unions can take on this task alone or whether they should enter into alliances, partnerships and cooperation with other organisations (see Section 5 below).

Thus, although a huge challenge, it is possible: organising the »unorganisables« in the informal economy is happening and therefore, very far from being an illusion. On the other hand, the findings support the statement that it is crucial to take into account the specific points of departure, the working and living conditions, the various identities and also the challenges and contradictions that specifically apply to millions of workers beyond the so called »standard employment relationship« (Mückenberger 1985). All of these case studies, in one way or another, tell one basic story: It is important to recognise and accept that workers choose how they organise themselves at a particular time and with respect to particular issues, such as increased outsourcing, various forms of harassment, various identities as well as social and political contexts. Or to put it in the language of the power resources approach: attempts to organise informal and precarious workers by traditional forms of union organisation often coincides with the rise of new forms of associational power.

3. The Challenge of Globalisation: Bringing Together the Local and the Global

Globalisation has become a household word that for millions of workers has sparked hopes of higher living standards and decent work. But all too often the word means only uncertainty, loss of jobs and income, and upheaval. Outsourcing, offshoring, sub-contracting and global competition have taken their toll on union membership. For many, this development is not only threatening, it has taken on a look of being inescapable. But is that really so? Is there no way for workers and trade unions around the world to collectively exercise their democratic rights to form unions, to voice their concerns and represent their interests?

Over the past decades governments around the world have bent over backwards to provide transnational corporations (TNCs) with investment subsidies, tax breaks and deregulated labour markets – often in an openly anti-union atmosphere endangering democratic workers' rights. Corporate investments flow where governments pursue »competitiveness« (deregulation) while workers' rights and democracy often suffer.

TNCs have reaped enormous benefits from this development and constructed a new system of international

economic and social power relations beyond the nation-state (May 2006). Today, TNCs operate through vast networks of extraction, production, supply, distribution, and sales that they control. These »webs of power«, spread across the globe, overlapping and interlocking, account for 80 per cent of international trade. This kind of economic power is massive, bringing relocation, outsourcing, offshoring, pitting workers in one locality against those in another and undercutting local and national trade union bargaining power (Chen 2018; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Trade Organization (WTO) and UNCTAD 2013).

Trade unions require bold new approaches of transnational solidarity to combat this downward spiral, curtail the power of TNCs and meet the challenge of securing a collective voice for workers in global value chains (Fichter 2015; McCallum 2013). As several of our case studies show, when workers are mobilised, they may have structural power, as with the workers at Starbucks in Chile or in the Russian auto industry. But to sustain the gains achieved in mobilising their power resources at the workplace, workers need associational power. In struggling against TNCs, unions must bring together the local and the global, working across national borders to achieve their goals.

Associational power, the organised and collective means of representing workers' interests, is at the core of all of the cases involving transnational action, but its local manifestation was never relied upon exclusively. It was transnational pressure based on the associational power of many unions in different countries that provided decisive support for the Turkish transport workers' union TÜMTIS in its successful campaigns to organise two global delivery companies: UPS and DHL. Using its own associational power resources of membership participation and internal cohesion, and actively developing the support of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and UNI Global Union, TÜMTIS was able to withstand massive anti-union attacks by those companies. TÜMTIS proved capable of framing and articulating a winning strategy.

Faced with the spread of precarious and informal employment, deteriorating working conditions and trade union fragmentation, the Kenya National Private Security Workers Union (KNPSWU) strengthened its associational power by building internal cohesion through members' participation and ownership of the union. It also gained

needed support from UNI Global Union in organising workers at the transnational corporation G4S. UNI's global framework agreement with G4S which covers labour relations and employment standards was used to gain access to workplaces. This contributed to the success of the union's organising efforts.

In addition to these examples, other case studies show how unions have developed cross-border bilateral and multilateral cooperative projects. For example, the German metalworkers' union IG Metall is using its associational and institutional power to support the U.S. autoworkers' union UAW in its organising campaigns at the U.S. subsidiaries of German carmakers and suppliers. In South America, the ITF has worked closely with unions from several countries to build a powerful network representing workers at the LATAM airline. Supported by the network's commitment to democratic union structures, LATAM workers developed strong relationships of trust with each other, exchanged vital information, and coordinated strategies to win concessions from their anti-union employer. Another transnational union network, the Liga Sindical for the predominantly female garment workers in Central America and the Caribbean, has brought together local and national unions, enhancing their associational power and enabling them to tackle structural weaknesses and coordinate campaigns. Unions have also created transnational bodies to coordinate policies and influence regional social policies and political institutions. Two examples of this are presented in our project case studies on the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) and the ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council (ASETUC).

Transnational solidarity has long been a watchword anchored in trade union programs and policies and these cases are prime examples of unions finding ways to practice it. Strengthening union associational, institutional and societal power through transnational cooperation has been recognised by some unions (especially in the Global South) as being in the mutual self-interest of all unions and a needed counter-weight to nationalistic and xenophobic appeals (especially in the Global North). Today's globalised world impacts workers and their unions ever more directly, so that the need for transnational cooperation in defending themselves at home, i. e. linking the local with the global, is growing. In some cases, local associational power is bolstered through the transnational resources provided by global unions.

In other cases, local unions have found support outside their country in the societal power of allied consumer groups and social movements. And there are transnational union initiatives that use their institutional power to strengthen their cross-border interest representation with governments. Transnational solidarity does not come easy, but without it, the terms of globalisation will be left to others to define.

4. New Windows of Opportunity in Flexible Capitalism

Globalisation and technological innovation does not only go along with a reorganisation of spatial structures but also with changes in the temporalities of capitalism. During the last few decades, the globalisation of capitalism has accelerated with the emergence of flexible global production networks, just-in-time production and time-pressured large-scale investment projects. All this has redefined the world of labour (Harvey 1990; Sennett 1998; Holst 2014) as companies strive to build flexibility buffers with short time contracts and agency work to cope with crises and changing demand. The coming of digital capitalism heightens dependency on flexible forms of labour. For instance, e-commerce and logistics sometimes draw on highly deregulated *work on demand*, when orders are placed online and goods are delivered to customers within hours.

It has therefore become a commonplace among academics and trade union officials that outsourcing, offshoring and the shift of orders to other production facilities tend to weaken workers' ability to resist at the shop floor level (Frobel et al. 1980; Western 1995; critical: Silver 2003: 3ff.). However, the impact of flexibilised global production networks on labour power is contradictory. The changing temporality of capitalism also creates new spaces of resistance, as global production and logistics become more vulnerable to work stoppages (e. g. Fichter 2015, Herod 2000). In the TUiT project there are some cases that highlight such »windows of opportunities« which emerge in flexibilised production networks and time-pressured construction sites. For instance, in the case of Brazil, trade unions benefitted from the localised structural power of workers at construction sites for commercial mega sports events (Football World Cup 2014, Olympics 2016). Trade unions coordinated work stoppages, using workers' structural power effectively to force construction companies, under pressure to meet

completion deadlines, to negotiate better pay and working conditions. Associational power was also built under the leadership of the global union Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) that ran a transnational support campaign. Hence, the huge investment projects opened up a temporary window of opportunity for local trade unions and transnational campaigns to act.

A case of union organising which targeted flexible production networks is the Turkish TÜMTIS union. TÜMTIS was able to exert relatively high structural power in its struggle against the delivery and logistics companies UPS and DHL. Both companies are particularly vulnerable to strike actions, as delivery companies have not only private customers who receive parcels and documents. They also provide logistics solutions for companies such as warehousing, distribution, transportation and customs clearing. The union's campaign maintained picket lines over several months, generating public awareness and international support. By connecting the local struggle with global support TÜMTIS was able to target the supply chains and production networks of UPS and DHL customers in Turkey thereby highlighting the vulnerability of flexible production. Similarly, the South African metalworkers' union NUMSA adopted a new strategy of organising along value chains in order to increase its structural and associational power. The union's strategy has resulted in an increase of members from sectors such as air transportation, construction and railways.

These examples are indicative of how workers and unions have addressed the growing pressures of today's globalised and flexibilised capitalism. They have seized on windows of opportunity created by increasing structural power along the supply chains and in the logistics of globalised production. These new temporalities and spatialities of power are reflected in both a short-term increase of power in specific industries (e.g. the Brazilian mega sport events) and a general reorganisation of production (and power resources) by outsourcing, lean management and digitalisation.

5. Beyond the Workplace: The Challenges of Political and Social Alliances

Alliances with social movements, NGOs, political parties and consumers, as well as community-based activities, are considered an important strategy of innovative un-

ionism today (Webster 1988; Seidman 1994; Needleman 1998; Voss and Sherman 2000; Tattersall 2009). There are numerous success stories of such cooperation efforts, in particular when workers' actions at the plant level or existing institutional procedures are insufficient to reach a compromise with employers or the state.

Alliances can be temporary or long-term. They can be issue-related or based on broader common interests. Alliances should be voluntary and reciprocal – if a political party leaves a trade union with no choice but to act according to the party line, turning it into a 'transmission belt' for the party, this should not be referred to as alliance-building.

Alliances may evolve through organisational interaction, for example when activists are involved in both trade unions and NGOs/social movements or political parties. The case study from Tunisia is an example of the former, the case from Uruguay of the latter. Alliances growing out of social protests are also widespread, or they may be pursued intentionally to attain particular goals. For instance the the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) pushed for both political and social alliances through lobbying and the institutionalisation of relationships with specific NGOs. Other trade union campaign alliances, especially those targeting multinational companies, focus on building support among consumers and communities. In the TUiT project, the LATAM network, the mega sport events in Brazil and the organising drives at Starbucks and Samsung are examples of such cases.

The TUiT project has identified two categories of alliances: alliances that are more socially oriented and alliances with political parties. Social alliances can take various forms: they can be with specific NGOs such as human rights organisations or associations representing workers in the informal economy, or with broader social movements, for example the environmentalist movement, the feminist movement, the landless movement, or a movement of the unemployed. Sometimes they may specifically involve consumers in general or (potential) customers of specific companies (e.g. Starbucks) or the interested public (e.g. football fans). For trade unions, moving beyond the sphere of workplace activities toward building social alliances is often challenging. But it can also be more than a necessity – and even mutually beneficial to all participants. For example, social alliances can help anchor the reception of trade unions in

society, adding weight and legitimacy to their demands and increasing public influence or even potentially boosting membership. Good examples of this may be found in the case studies on the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) in Tunisia and the pharmaceutical union, Asociación Agentes de Propaganda Médica (AAPM) in Argentina. And trade unions can benefit from NGO expertise in specific policy fields. For NGOs and social movements, the associational power of trade unions and their ability to mobilise (even beyond the workplace) can be a crucial element in a campaign. And too, trade unions can potentially be an attractive »mouthpiece«, precisely because of their institutional power, which is usually much greater than that of NGOs or social movements.

The situation is more complex with regard to political alliances. These may result from a historically founded interest of the union movement and a political party to contribute to a common political project – e.g. nation-building, socio-economic development, fighting poverty, pushing structural change for more social justice. This typically translates into greater institutional power – which can substantially boost union power overall and achieve very palpable results.

In many instances there is no clearly defined dividing line between these types of alliances as their focus and strategies may change over time. In the cases of the TUiT project, those unions that opted for political alliances, built social alliances at the same time, though to a varying degree. Common to them all however is that the key power resource they rely on is societal power. By expanding the basis of support beyond the workplace or the company, a union can strengthen its leverage in negotiations or conflicts with employers and government. Alliance building can also compensate weak structural power as well as weak institutional power. This means that alliance-building is not only for trade unions that are »strong« in the classic sense. In the informal sector or in precarious work contexts, alliance-building is essential for generating a basis for exercising power. Trade unions that have won the support of communities affected by the policies they are targeting, for example in the case from India, have enhanced their leverage significantly. Similar successes are to be found in the South Korean case, where the union built strong political alliances, and in the Starbucks case from Chile, where the workers' cause found the support of consumers. As the Tunisian case indicates, social alliance-building may be possible

even in contexts of political repression. Successful political alliance-building may even lead to an increase in structural power on a long term basis, e.g. through minimum wage increases or other policies to increase the economic well-being of workers (cf. Brazil). And as the case of the Indonesian trade union movement shows, member supported leadership and organisational democracy are essential elements of building effective and sustainable political alliances.

Nevertheless, alliance building, especially with regard to political parties, is not without risks. For one, success may lead to a loss of autonomy and necessitate making compromises that foster disappointment among supporters, as shown in the case study from Indonesia. Political alliances may also hinder social alliances, if trade unions are seen as being too closely allied to government. An example of this is the case of the South African trade union federation COSATU. Rising dissent over the politics of COSATU's alliance with the ruling party resulted in the metalworkers' union NUMSA breaking with the political alliance and shifting its priorities to fostering social alliances.

Another risk concerns the ambivalence of institutional power. It may grant trade unions external anchors of power and influence. The case study on the »End to Cheap Labour« campaign of the Czech union confederation ČMKOS is instructive of how unions can use their associational and societal power to gain institutional power. Nevertheless, institutional power is based on compromise with competing interests and so may restrict a union's power to act. Where a trade union is historically embedded in the political economy of a country and thus wielding institutional power, this power resource can only be maintained if the union does not put into question the established order. Project cases from Vietnam, Tunisia, and South Africa illustrate this dilemma quite well. An over-reliance on institutional power may also lead to excessive bureaucratisation and a neglect of maintaining or increasing the unions' associational power. Finally, the close alliance with political parties in government means that a trade union has a lot to lose if, as in Brazil, the party loses power. If the union's power is not anchored elsewhere an alliance risks being unsustainable.

Therefore, trade unions have to critically assess the chances and limitations of entering into or maintaining

union-party-alliances as well as the impact these alliances might have on the ability of unions to link up with social movements and civil society organisations. Overall, alliances can be an important leverage to strengthen union influence and to broaden their agenda.

6. The Challenge of Participation: New Forms of Engagement and Empowerment

One of the root causes for the decreasing significance of unions all over the world seems to be a lack of internal democracy, a lack of workers' control and a lack of *participative unionism*. A particularly noticeable form that this often takes is the underrepresentation of women. Therefore, an important aspect of building associational power is the relationship between leadership and participation within unions that is raised in many of the case studies. The challenge trade unions all over the world are faced with is to maintain organisational efficiency without stifling rank-and-file participation. As it was argued in the framework paper of the TUiT project, »without active participation, the trade union turns into a bureaucratic organisation, whilst a very high level of member participation is difficult to sustain and may in the long run undermine efficiency«. (Schmalz and Dörre 2018: 4). As unions address the challenges of transnationalising and value chain organising, it is becoming even more important to find ways to accommodate an increasingly diverse range of competing views and aspirations.

By shedding light on the complex and dynamic relationship between leadership and rank and file participation, the case studies provide important insights on the processes that contributed to strengthening internal cohesion and associational power of these unions. The situation of a »crisis of representation« (Webster and Buhlungu 2004) was not unknown to the trade unions that formed part of the FES project: In Kenya, for instance, the private security sector union, KNPSWU, had a long history of splits, ineffective organisation and leadership fights which nearly decimated the union. In South Africa the social distance between leadership and members, factionalism and the lack of internal cohesion had significantly increased. And in Honduras, the teachers' union COLPEDAGOGOSH has survived repressive government policies through internal organisational reforms that strengthened participation and facilitated cooperation with democratic social movements.

The case studies of the TUiT project demonstrate that the »crisis of representation« is not inevitable and that a number of trade unions have successfully enhanced membership participation in order to break the »iron law of oligarchy« (Michels 1989). Particularly instructive in this regard are the case studies of trade unions in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Turkey, South Africa and of the LATAM union network in South America. They underline the relevance of leadership *and* participation for trade union renewal. In other words, leadership matters, but so does membership participation.

In sum, the following factors were particularly relevant for trade unions in the TUiT project:

- *Membership participation*: Trade unions initiated organisational reforms that included both statutory revisions that opened the union to new members and strengthened workplace representation and membership participation. All members, new and old, needed to have a sense of belonging, enabled by members being able to influence decision-making processes and shape the direction of the union's policy. Membership participation is therefore one dimension which is crucial for trade union renewal as democracy and participation are likely to reduce gaps of representation between leadership and members and allow for new groups of members to express their set of values in the union (e. g. Voss 2010; Turner 2005; Voss and Sherman 2000). Taking the KNPSWU in Kenya as an example, the union increased its sustainability and organisational efficiency while also seeking to enhance the empowerment of its members. A key lesson was that the guards wanted »their own union« – a union formed, led and run by guards. Besides strengthening the role of shop steward committees, election to a union office was made contingent on being a worker (formerly) employed in the industry. Membership participation contributed to attracting new members, increase the credibility of the union and enhance its internal cohesion. By 2016 membership had risen significantly from less than 500 to nearly 50,000.
- *Bottom-up Organising*: Bottom-up Organising is more likely to be sustainable when trade unions strengthened the role of members and shop stewards in the recruitment process. Campaigns with an »informed, hands-on rank-and-file involvement«

also tend to be more successful (Turner 1998: 132). This has been the case, for instance, in the transport and logistics sector in Turkey. The union TÜMTIS had very limited access to professional staff for organising. Therefore, organising drives were dependent on significant support from grass-roots members. The active and broad involvement of grass-roots members has furthermore helped to withstand attacks by employers.

- *Responsive Leadership:* While the case studies highlight the increase in member participation as a success factor, the leadership played an important role in initiating union renewal, enabling change and increasing participation. Changes in unions were triggered internally through a change in leadership or the political orientation of leaders, or externally, through attacks and losses of union power. Successful responses were marked by an ability to learn from previous experiences and an open-mindedness to experiment with new methods and forms of engagement. Leaders who are accessible to members can build relations of trust and mediate between different demands. In Turkey, for instance, leaders believe that they »share a common fate« with their members. This is mirrored in a modest lifestyle, through a continuous interaction with members and a strong emphasis on internal democracy especially during collective bargaining and organising campaigns.
- *Women's Empowerment:* Strengthening the representation of women, especially in leadership positions, is a challenge for trade unions everywhere. Affirmative action and targeted measures toward women's empowerment such as quotas or even parity rules can be necessary to achieve substantial change in power relations and to put women on a more equal footing with men. As the case study of the largest Brazilian union federation CUT demonstrates, their introduction and step by step expansion was crucial for gradually building and increasing women's institutional power within the union and for integrating gender issues into the union's agenda and actions, e.g. in collective bargaining. The union federation's success was based on both a top-down and a bottom-up approach which depended on each other. Top-down measures are only decided upon, implemented and sustained if there is enough pressure and successful action from below, whereas

action from below is often too weak if no »critical mass« of women is present in leadership positions. In the CUT, one of the keys to women's empowerment therefore was to build sufficient pressure to have the leadership – and ideally the membership – recognise that gender inequality in the union was a big problem, and that this problem demanded action in the interest of the union's future. Despite conflicts and setbacks, CUT's efforts to reach gender parity in leadership positions were ultimately successful. Indeed, the recognition of the union as a defender of women's rights and gender equality within society has actually made union membership and involvement more attractive for women.

- *Deep Education:* In fostering participation, a strong emphasis was placed on the education of shop stewards and union members. Education was not seen as an add-on but as an integral part of building associational power. In South America, education work was regarded as inseparable from building the base of the union network representing workers at the LATAM airline. More than just skills development, education work aimed at empowering workers to learn from each other, build collective consciousness, and participate more actively in union affairs. Education was regarded as an integral part of organising and building the organisation. It was furthermore understood as a collective process based on workers' experiences and expertise. In the LATAM case, this included company mapping exercises as well as workshops on the use of social and news media. Workers were also involved in developing educational material, including a popular quiz on the relevance of bargaining agreements. In the words of participants: »Building the base (...) without education is simply mobilising workers to act without building leadership. Education work without organising the base increases the skills of particular leaders but does not create the collective conversations and consciousness necessary to move forward.« (Feller and Conrow 2017: 15)

In conclusion, by finding new ways for meaningful participation of union members, including specific measures for empowering women, it was possible to resolve conflicts within unions, to attract new members, increase internal solidarity and workers' sense of ownership of the union. The case studies demonstrate that internal structures and the interplay between leadership and the

rank-and-file can be an important factor for enhancing and deepening unions' associational power, and in fact for mobilising all of the union's power resources. Strong associational power is therefore not only based on measurable indicators such as membership numbers but also entails a qualitative dimension such as internal cohesion, mobilisation and broad engagement. Without rebuilding and re-energising their membership and re-establishing a close relationship between leadership, shop stewards and the rank-and-file unions will fail to restore themselves to a position of strength vis-à-vis employers and governments.

7. Summary and Review

Trade unions are always challenged to respond to the ever present profit-seeking dynamics of capitalism. Today, more than ever, the struggles are about precarisation and informalisation, global value chains and outsourcing, neoliberal policies, digitalisation, diversity, or workers' rights. The TUiT case studies show that trade unions can and have responded successfully. They have proven to be strategic actors, actors that can make strategic choices to find responses to these (and many other) challenges, actors that can make a huge difference in the life of workers. And in facing these challenges and devising new strategies unions have shown that they can also be revitalised organisationally.


The case studies of the TUiT project have used the power resources approach to analyse these success stories and show how the different dimensions of power – structural, associational, institutional, and societal – have been mobilised, enabling unions to achieve important goals. They also show that as an analytical tool, the power resources approach is highly useful for practitioners. All unions have power resources, but the key is to mobilise them strategically. Unions can use this tool to identify their power resources and how they may be used effectively toward revitalising their organisations, winning campaigns and successfully influencing politics. Again, all trade unions have power resources, and they can use them in the interest of their members and to influence the structural imbalance between capital and labour in their favour.

Trade unions have mobilised their power resources while also recognising that power is relational and context dependent. Our case studies, situated in a wide range of

local, sectoral, national and transnational settings, show clearly that trade union power does not exist in a vacuum. Setting new goals or responding to an internal or external crisis may be conflict ridden. And union power must be deployed in recognition of counter-power as exercised by employers or by the state. Unions need to be realistic, but also, for example, be open to making use of windows of opportunity that result from the demands of fragmented production processes in global value chains – i.e. just-in-time production and logistics. Production and services in global capitalism are increasingly time-pressured. That becomes a challenge for union organising, but it also presents an opportunity for unions and workers to disrupt production and pressure management to recognise their demands.

Unions have agency. They are relevant and powerful collective actors. In a variety of ways, the unions in the case studies have demonstrated creativity in meeting the challenges they faced. They have looked for and found new approaches to representing the interests of their members, and in turn, to revitalising or redefining their organisational foundations. The individual case studies each provide valuable insights that can be helpful for other trade unions in the midst of change or seeking to cope with new challenges. But there are also common threads to be found across the different cases. For one, enabling and fostering member participation proved to be crucial in so many cases for successfully mobilising the power resources of the union. Building – or rebuilding – union power is hardly sustainable otherwise. Active members identify with their union; they are a sign of democracy in practice and the backbone of collective action. The members are the union! They are the union's internal sources of power. And, participation is hollow without gender equality.

Secondly, the success story in many of the cases resulted from a union overcoming divides to organise the so-called »unorganisables«. The divides referred to are inherent to capitalist labour policy of fragmenting and deregulating labour. In particular in the Global South, the informal economy is pervasive. Thus, there exists a divide between workers in the formal economy, with its regulations however minimal they may be, and the majority of workers in the informal economy whose labour is virtually unregulated. In several of the case studies, unions organised informal workers, often broadening their existing (and dwindling) membership base in the



formal economy. In other cases the divide is between so-called core workers with relatively secure standard employment contracts and »atypical« workers in precarious employment relations with no job security, lower wages, no social protection and irregular hours. Unions found it imperative to find ways to address the exploitation of these workers, bring back protective standards and frame this struggle in terms of being a necessity for betterment of all workers.

A further insight from several of the case studies is that alliances with non-union organisations can be useful for trade unions in many struggles. Focussing on workplace issues in negotiations with employers is standard policy, but in some workplace conflicts the issues can be framed more broadly, and support in the community and from other organisations and social movements can be effective in countering employer power and creating a more level playing field. Many trade unions are also closely aligned with political parties, and this can be helpful in establishing legal standards. But such alliances can also be restrictive, and unions – and their members – must weigh the advantages and disadvantages carefully.

The potential strength of forming alliances also points to another very basic insight: solidarity. In a variety of ways, unions in the cases studies developed practices

and strategies of inclusive solidarity. The examples given above of crossing the divides was one of these; another comes from the cases of transnational union cooperation bringing the support of unions elsewhere to a local union conflict. Or to take another, highly important, example, introducing new measures to promote diversity and ensure that women are equally represented in union leadership.

The insights gained from the TUiT project are both a step forward in developing the use of power resources and a confirmation of the usefulness of this analytical tool for trade unions and activists in a wide range of settings, whether in the Global North or in the Global South. The project case studies make trade union strategies available for sharing and learning. Trade unions have shown that they have the strength, the resources, the willingness and the capabilities to find new strategies to cope with new challenges. In the end, union renewal and the capacity to respond successfully is a continuing struggle. Unions learn through such struggles – and they can learn from the struggles of other unions. The Trade Unions in Transformation project has provided impulses for such processes of organisational learning and revitalisation. Engaging with its case studies and insights is an opportunity for understanding and enhancing union power – today and in the future.



Acronyms

AAPM	Asociación Agentes de Propaganda Médica, Argentina
ASETUC	ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council
ATGWU	Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union, Uganda
BWI	Building and Wood Workers' International
ČMKOS	Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions
COLPEDAGOGOSH	Colegio de Pedagogos de Honduras
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CUT	Central Única dos Trabalhadores, Brasil
IG Metall	Industriegewerkschaft Metall (German Metalworkers' Union)
ITF	International Transport Workers' Federation
KMWU	Korean Metal Workers Union, South Korea
KNPSWU	Kenya National Private Security Workers Union
NASVI	National Association of Street Vendors of India
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NUTGTWN	National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRA	Power Resources Approach
TNC	Transnational corporation
TUCA	Trade Union Confederation of the Americas
TÜMTİS	Tüm Taşıma İşçileri Sendikası (Turkish transport workers union)
TUİT	Trade Unions in Transformation
UAW	United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, USA
UGTT	Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail, Tunisia
UNCTAD	United Nations conference on Trade and Development
WTO	World Trade Organization



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