

LABOUR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

# THE INTEREST OF INFORMAL LABOUR IN TRADE UNIONS

Findings from Representative Country Surveys  
in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Should trade unions in Sub-Saharan Africa organize the informally employed? The organizational debate is on, but empirical research on views and expectations of those who are targeted and operate under informal employment conditions is largely missing.



Do the informally employed want to be organized by trade unions? What kind of support do they expect? Do they want to leave their own groups when joining trade unions or do they prefer affiliation as a collective to individual membership?



The report presents the findings of country-wide representative opinion polls of the informally employed and their views on trade unions. The polls were jointly conducted by FES (lead agent), ILO and DIE-GDI and cover Kenya (2018), Benin (2018), Senegal (2019) and Zambia (2019).



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In many countries, trade unions appear to be going backwards and losing their capacity to influence social and labour policies because their membership base is shrinking dramatically. A discourse is gaining momentum that trade unions, in order to turn this situation around, should open up to hitherto ignored segments of the labour market and start organizing the informally employed. Is the informal labour force, whose share of total labour in nearly all countries is growing and in Sub-Saharan Africa provides income to 80 to 90 per cent of workers, a future recruitment terrain for trade unions? What capacities do trade unions need to recruit members from fields they have hitherto neglected? What service profile do they have to build up to attract workers in informal employment? Are their traditional activities – such as collective bargaining and representing wage labour in dispute resolution – what the informal labour force needs? Or do trade unions have to come up with new services and find new ways and strategies for interest representation?

While the organizational debate on the future of trade unionism is active in trade union circles, informal employment as a potential recruitment field for trade unions has largely been ignored by empirical research. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in cooperation with the International Labour Office (ILO) and the German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, DIE) recently initiated a project on *Informal Employment, Social Protection and Political Trust* (IESPPT) in Sub-Saharan Africa. It includes a survey on ›views on trade unions‹ that sheds light on the willingness of the informal labour force to cooperate with trade unions or even join them as members or affiliates. The project centres on country-wide representative surveys, which are implemented in a uniform manner to allow comparison of findings across countries. The findings from the surveys in Kenya (October 2018), Benin (December 2018), Senegal (June 2019) and Zambia (September 2019) are presented in this report.

Key findings from ›views on trade unions‹ can be summarized as follows:

In general, members of the informal labour force<sup>1</sup> – which is made up of the four status groups ›employers‹, ›employ-

ees‹, ›own-account workers‹ and ›family support workers‹ – have a low level of awareness with regard to trade unions. Only 16 to 18 per cent, in Zambia a mere 7.7 per cent declare that they possess a basic knowledge of trade unions. Urban dwellers are more familiar with trade union affairs, but despite their proximity to urban-oriented union activities, large segments of the urban informal labour force are not aware of what trade unions stand for. This low level of knowledge points to a structural distance between the informal labour force and trade unions. Only between 1.6 per cent (Zambia) and 5.5 per cent (Senegal) of the informal labour force have ever participated in trade union activity. The low level of interconnection indicates that trade unions have largely neglected the informal economy.

Those segments of the informal labour force who are aware of trade unions, however, have a fairly positive perception of their role in their countries. They emphasize the importance of trade unions, believe that they help to improve the social situation for many people, and want trade unions to become even stronger. In different intensities, these views also point to the need for trade unions to improve their performance, become more efficient and less corrupt. Trade unionism as a principle is fully endorsed, but its practical implementation is not supported to the same extent.

There are concurrent and divergent views with regard to people's understanding of whose interests trade unions take care of. In all countries, a majority regard trade unions as an ›organizational bond‹ in the formal sector that link employees and employers together for the benefit of both. Employees and governments, however, are not bound together in adversarial employment relations and even employers in the private sector are appraised as beneficiaries of trade union dealings. Trade unions thus are not perceived as agents of conflict. A clear majority see the formal sector as the world of ›better living‹ to which governments, government employees and trade unions likewise belong.

Views differ when it comes to assessing the role of trade unions in improving the situation for ›workers in the informal

<sup>1</sup> Use of the term ›informal labour force‹ is not technically correct here, as it includes those who are unemployed. We use ›informal labour force‹ synonymously with ›informal employment‹ because (i) in coun-

tries with no unemployment insurance, unemployment remains unregistered; and (ii) the key problem is not unemployment, but underemployment. Due to the absence of unemployment benefits, people have to accept even minor jobs to make (a little) income.

economy. In Benin and Kenya, a majority of those who know about trade unions perceive them as being beneficial for their interests, while in Senegal and Zambia a majority deny such an impact. Even then, the numbers of those who regard trade unions as playing a positive role for ›workers in the informal economy‹ are several times higher than those who point to personal contacts with trade unions or who have participated in their activities. There is a ›leap of faith‹ with regard to trade unions that is not related to personal experience.

The fact that some segments of the informal labour force pin their hopes on trade unions is confirmed by their interest in becoming a member. Extrapolated to the whole informal work force, interest in trade union membership stands as follows: Benin 4.2 per cent; Kenya 7.9 per cent; Senegal 7.7 per cent; and Zambia 5.2 per cent. Low as these shares may look at a first glance, they encompass many more than those with personal experience and reflect, again, the motive of ›joining an organization‹ that is perceived to deliver gains from membership.

The interest of informal workers in joining a trade union, when expressed in absolute terms and compared with current trade union membership, is sizeable. In Kenya, some 1,400,000 informally employed people are willing to join trade unions. For Benin, the figure is 200,000, Senegal 300,000, and Zambia 300,000. Winning over the ›already motivated‹ among the informal labour force for membership could easily double current trade union membership. An information campaign on what trade unions stand for and a mobilizing strategy that offers opportunities to participate in activities could substantially enlarge the interested segments. Viewed from this angle, the recruitment potential is large.

Campaigning for membership among individuals in many dispersed employment locations may not be the easiest approach and trade unions may opt for strategies to win over larger groups as collective members or affiliates. If these groups show no interest in dissolving after affiliation but want to remain intact and pursue their original purpose, unions will have to offer them a special service package to convince them to apply for membership or retain it. To shed light on the recruitment of collectives, the survey identified respondents who were already self-organized and asked them whether they would like to see their groups as affiliates.

Key findings from ›views on trade unions‹ among group members can be summarized as follows:

In the four survey countries, around half of the informally employed are members of various types of organizations, of which savings clubs, religious associations and cooperatives (including credit unions) are the most prominent. The willingness of members of these groups to cooperate with trade unions is pronounced. On average, 32.8 per cent – with country variations ranging from 27.4 per cent for Senegal and 40.0 per cent for Kenya – declare their intention to affiliate with trade unions. Even though this does not count

the number of groups but the number of members and thus still articulates a minority view, hope for closer cooperation is already widespread.

Concerning the spectrum of services that trade unions could provide, the majority of respondents seek support in regard to the following: ›help us that government listens to our problems‹, ›help us to improve our working conditions‹, ›help us to get our own seat in the social dialogue with government‹, and ›help us in collective bargaining with local authorities‹. Mostly rejected are ›financial support for our own secretariat‹, ›financial support for our own activities‹, and ›help us in recruiting more members for our own organization‹. On other services, views were divided.

Trade unions are accredited with a comparative advantage with regard to bargaining and participation in social dialogue. The rejection of financial support for ›our own secretariat‹ and ›our own activities‹ emphasize at the same time an understanding that affiliation should not mean interference in internal affairs and not be equated with the end of organizational autonomy. The original purpose for which a group was established should endure and activities not end when affiliating with trade unions.

Leading groups of the informal workforce in terms of membership include savings clubs, religious associations and cooperatives (including credit unions). Groups that organize around employment issues, such as trade unions and professional organizations, play a minor role. While the three dominant groups represent different purposes and have diverse ways of operating, the views of a majority of their members on trade unions are similar. For most, differences in the objectives of their groups do not imply different views on trade unions and do not preclude them from requesting trade union affiliation.

Much of the motivation for cooperating with trade unions, however, is extra-organizational. For a majority, the interest in trade unions is based on personal reasons and not founded in the belief that affiliation would affect the group's activities. On personal grounds, members of a religious group can join a trade union, as can members of political parties or resident associations. For many group members, we cannot identify a collective interest that exists beyond a personal interest. Trade union affiliation is motivated by expectations of personal benefits, even though it may be irrational, if contrasted with the objective of the group.

Trade unions are viewed as well-funded organizations. Classified by the degree to which group members are willing to pay fees to trade unions, we find only a minority who declared a willingness to pay normal membership fees when affiliating. The overwhelming majority in all countries want either a discount or free services. The degree of rejection of paying full membership fees differs only marginally in the four countries.

In general, members of groups express a surprisingly strong interest in affiliating with trade unions as a collective. Much

of what they want to gain from membership is, however, not related to the purpose for which their own group exists but is instead oriented towards personal benefits. In groups that have a functional affinity to trade unions, such as cooperatives, discrepancies between individual and collective interests may not matter. In groups set up for a purpose that cannot easily be harmonized with the operations of trade unions, however, this contradiction has to be reckoned with.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TRADE UNION RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

What are the implications of these findings in terms of whether it makes sense for trade unions to reach out to the informal labour force and start a recruitment campaign?

If trade unions initiated such a membership campaign, they would not be entering terrain in which they were completely unknown. In the countries covered here, the informal labour force represents 70 to 90 per cent of total employment and four to seven per cent of workers already show interest in membership. In absolute figures this may outstrip current membership, which stems mainly from the formal labour sector.

The potential reaches far beyond that. Lack of knowledge of trade unions and not yet declaring an interest in membership do not mean that large segments of the informal labour force cannot be organized. Trade unions can easily enlarge their base if they design an information campaign about what they stand for and come up with an organizing strategy that includes a variety of possible interventions to address core interests of target groups. There is no doubt that the informal labour force may become a platform for trade unions to double, treble or further multiply their membership. If successfully implemented, the voice of trade unions would certainly become stronger and socio-politically more influential.

In what ways can the findings of our opinion poll be related to trade union reflections on organizing segments of the informal employment? This largely depends on the direction unions want to take in gaining new members. Basically, there appears to be a matrix of four different approaches. On one hand, unions have to decide whether they want the membership of individuals or of groups. On the other hand, they have to choose whether new members could come from all branches and occupations of the labour market (open recruitment) or whether certain niches or branches and occupations should be prioritized (strategic recruitment).

In the case of open recruitment, the following findings should be considered:

- Additional membership should not be equated with substantially higher income from fees. Unions may encounter notable resistance when collecting fees from individuals or groups. Unions should be prepared to subsidize membership from the informal labour force at least for an initial period.
  - Many individuals interested in unions may pin their hopes on finding employment opportunities in the formal economy. They may see an application for membership as a springboard to enter the privileged world of formal employment relations. Most unions, however, may find it difficult to function as job placement agencies.
  - Individuals may want to join unions for material benefits, but bargaining for better conditions may become difficult, if not impossible, if members are thinly spread throughout the economy. To avoid trade union energies being dissipated and exhausted, targeting larger groups may be advantageous.
  - If trade unions opt for group membership, they may want groups to dissolve after affiliation and substitute group with direct membership. Many self-organization initiatives among the informal labour force, however, produce fairly stable structures with high satisfaction levels and an unwillingness to see their own groups dissolved. In many cases, trade unions will not be able to substitute the functionality of new affiliates with their own activities. Instead, they have to provide a service as an add-on and accept that affiliates will maintain their organizational existence.
  - Groups whose objectives lie some distance away from the operations of trade unions may have unrealistic, if not irrational expectations of possible gains from membership. It will be difficult to come up with a common platform on which an umbrella union and a new affiliate can join hands for concerted action.
- If unions opt for open recruitment, they may be confronted with high expectations that may be overoptimistic. This is less likely if strategic recruitment is chosen and unions decide beforehand which sectors to focus on, which types of organization to consider and which form of employment to address. Under such circumstances, group affiliation can become the result of a negotiated deal, which allows them to adjust expectations on gains and costs to a realistic level and build a common platform based on the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. Organizational synergies become the overriding motivation.
- The same may be the case if not groups but unorganized individuals are the target of recruitment strategies. Here again, trade unions may select economic sectors and focus on branches in which they already have an organizational presence. Resources in short supply, such as sending activists to locations with a high number of workplaces, can be used in a more economical manner. Limiting recruitment targets to fewer locations with more workplaces may make it possible to come up with a unified set of demands to smooth the way for collective bargaining.
- Our survey is built on a representative sample of the whole informal labour force and not designed to highlight problems for trade unions that opt for a strategic recruitment ap-

proach in branches and niches of the labour market in which they already have an organizational presence and in which an organizational synergy between trade unions and informal sector associations may be easier to achieve. A survey that tries to produce more insights into how to design a strategic recruitment approach should set specific priorities for a sample design: (i) focus on economic sectors in which organizing activities by both trade unions and informal sector organizations are ongoing; and (ii) attend to the views not only of members but of the leadership and activists in informal sector organizations; (iii) include questions that make it possible to differentiate between various forms of cooperation, including temporary alliance building. In this way, a survey will not be representative of the whole informal labour force but target a controlled collective with a good knowledge of organizing strategies and ›in charge‹ of group affairs. Such a sample may not be based on random selection but on information provided by trade unions and aligned to their interests. Trade unions should use empirical research methods to attain a clearer understanding of the pros and cons of various recruitment strategies.

## 1

INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

A new discussion is gaining momentum on the future of trade unionism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Should trade unions organize the informally employed? This question has become the key focus in the discourse on trade unions' transformational power. The enduring economic crisis, industrial stagnation and financing problems in the public sectors of many countries has led to a shrinking of the formal sector and, along with that, the membership of many trade unions is in decline. Is informal employment – whose share in the total labour force in nearly all countries is growing and in Sub-Saharan Africa provides income to the large majority of workers – a future recruitment terrain for trade unions? Should trade unions under pressure to maintain their organizational relevance follow the shifting frontiers between formal and informal employment and become representative bodies in the context of employment relations that exist outside statutory labour norms?

The ILO has been using the term ›informally employed‹ in its labour surveys for a number of years.<sup>3</sup> The term ›informal employment‹ groups together four status groups: ›employers‹ and ›own-account workers‹ have an informal job if their enterprise is legally not separated from its owner (not incorporated) and not registered in a national register; ›employees‹ are grouped as informal, ›if their employment relationship is, in law or in practice, not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits‹ (ILO 2003<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Reinhard Bahn Müller, Thomas Greven, Herbert Jauch and Volker Winterfeld for the very helpful comments they made on drafts of this report. Special thanks go to project team members, in particular to Florence Bonnet who kept reminding me on terminological clarity and Manfred Öhm, who initiated the project and was always available to discuss the relevance of findings for trade unions. While the report is the outcome of an institutional cooperation between Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the International Labour Office and the Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, it does not reflect the views of the participating organizations but remains the responsibility of the author.

<sup>3</sup> The main advantage of this new concept is that it makes it possible to link ›formal economy‹ to ›informal employment‹. Workers can be employees of enterprises that are formally registered and fall into the category of formal sector enterprises, but are denied access to social security. This group of informal employees in the formal sector is growing and is a key concern not only in developing but in developed countries as well.

<sup>4</sup> ILO, Guidelines concerning a statistical definition of informal employment, 2003; [https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/standards-and-guidelines/guidelines-adopted-by-international-conferences-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS\\_087622/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/standards-and-guidelines/guidelines-adopted-by-international-conferences-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS_087622/lang--en/index.htm)

›Contributing family members‹ have an informal job by definition.

In a recent publication, the ILO provided a statistical picture of the size and composition of informal employment in a global perspective.<sup>5</sup> The statistics for Africa are presented in Table 1. Three things in particular matter for trade union recruitment campaigns:

- (i) employment opportunities are generated mainly in the informal segments of the economy (85.8 per cent), while work that is regulated by legal norms and subject to tax, as well as labour and social laws, constitutes only a minority of jobs (14.2 per cent);
- (ii) the inner composition of formal and informal labour markets differs vastly. Employees make up the bulk of employment in the formal arena (77.8 per cent), while own-account workers are the predominant group in informal employment (50.1 per cent);
- (iii) even though it is a smaller component of informal employment, informal wage labour exceeds formal wage labour in the ratio 2.3:1. If trade unions concentrated their interest representation on formal wage labour alone, they would ignore 69.9 per cent of wage labour, namely those who are employed informally.

Opening up to a segment of the economy that is built on different rules and does not implement labour law nor follow the norms of company registration, or even stands outside the scope of law, will pose new challenges for trade unions and raise questions to which they may not have immediate or easy answers. What capacities do trade unions need to recruit members from fields they hitherto neglected? What service profile do they have to build up to attract workers in informal employment? Is their traditional role – such as collective bargaining, representing wage labour in dispute resolution and participating in social dialogue – in demand from informal labour? Or do trade unions have to come up with new services and find new ways and strategies for interest representation?

<sup>5</sup> International Labour Office, Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture, Geneva: 2018.



Table 1  
Share and composition of formal and informal employment in Africa (%)

Africa	Total	Formal employment	Informal employment
all employment	100.0	14.2 (100.0)	85.8 (100.0)
employers	2.8	0.5 (3.2)	2.3 (2.7)
employees	36.5	11.0 (77.8)	25.5 (29.7)
own-account workers	45.7	2.7 (19.0)	43.0 (50.1)
contributing family workers	15.0	–	15.0 (17.5)

Note: Kenya is not part of the ILO statistical overview.  
Source: International Labour Office, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, Geneva: 2018:18, 24.

If trade unions decide to enter the world of informal employment, they will indeed face many challenges. Will they find themselves in unorganized territory or will they encounter established organizational forms that they will either have to replace or cooperate with? Should trade unions recruit workers as individuals or focus on corporate membership, taking on board existing groups and giving them a home as affiliates under a joint umbrella?

Inducing an organization to deal with different forms of employment may lead to constraints on existing services and resources. Will an excursion into the informal economy transform the apparatus of trade unions? Will the union bureaucracy just add new members? Or will the success of the new recruitment drive depend on setting up new service divisions, by and large transforming the functional focus. New members have to be integrated while respecting their voice and objectives. What happens if informal labour comes to outnumber formal labour? Will a possible new majority dilute traditional obligations? Will they challenge the leadership and elect new leaders from their own midst? And will traditional wage labour vote with its feet, turn its back on unions and leave in search of a new organizational home?

The discussion of these questions within trade union circles in Africa has been going on since the early 1990s, when the Trade Union Congress of Ghana encouraged the Union of Informal Workers Association (UNIWA) »to organize informal workers associations into its fold« (ILO 2019a: 22; see footnote 8). Over the years, many sectoral unions and national centres have followed suit, amending their constitutions and initiating recruitment<sup>6</sup> drives, often financially supported by trade union solidarity support organizations (TUSO). Many conferences have been organized, or are in the pipeline, to exchange views on how best to go forward. Despite some impressive numerical gains in recruiting informal economy workers, however, it is not yet clear where the journey will lead to. Many unions and national centres re-

main reluctant and many others who affiliate informal workers' associations do not (yet) provide membership with full voice.<sup>7</sup>

To date, little empirical research has been undertaken to try to follow and explain what is happening on the ground.<sup>8</sup> When mobilizing for membership, trade unions appear to concentrate on already successful organizing efforts, such as taxi driver associations in the transport sector. Or they affiliate with craft guilds and bring wage labour from textiles firms in touch with self-employed tailors.<sup>9</sup> Beyond a few documented cases, the wider trade union audience does not know much about ongoing initiatives and many of those pushing for the recruitment of informal labour are operating largely in the dark.

The informal economy is a vast terrain with a multitude of employment relations, some of which appear more trade union-friendly than others. No survey has hitherto been undertaken to shed light on how trade unions are perceived by informal labour across a whole country. We have no knowledge of which segments of informal labour are open to joining trade unions as members, and which are not. We do not know what kind of expectations informal labour has towards organized formal labour and what it would like to gain from potential affiliation with trade unions.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in cooperation with the International Labour Office (ILO) and the German Develop-

6 Recruitment means signing up members (often into existing unions). This differs from organizing, which is broader in that it focuses on political activation and mobilization in a variety of ways. Boosting union membership is crucial, but just one part of organizing.

7 The key reason provided in personal discussions can be phrased as »full participation only with a full financial contribution«.

8 Exceptions include: case studies in Mirko Herberg (ed.), *Trade unions in Transformation. Success stories from all over the world* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Berlin, 2018); various country reports of the Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Cooperation – Ulandssekretariatet (labour market profiles); International Labour Office (ILO), *Organizing Informal Economy Workers into Trade Unions: A trade union guide*, 2019a (available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms\\_711040.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_711040.pdf)); International Labour Office (ILO), *Interactions between Workers' Organizations and Workers in the Informal Economy: A Compendium of Practice*, 2019b (available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms\\_735630.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_735630.pdf)).

9 The interesting case of the Nigerian textile trade union is documented in Herberg (2018).

ment Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, DIE) recently carried out a project on Informal Employment, Social Protection and Political Trust (IESPPT) in Sub-Saharan Africa. The project centres on country-wide representative surveys, which are implemented following the same research method, so that the findings can be compared across borders. To date, surveys have been carried out in Kenya (October 2018), Benin (December 2018), Senegal (June 2019) and Zambia (September 2019), while further surveys are in preparation in Ivory Coast and Ethiopia.

The questionnaire is implemented in face-to-face interviews to a representative sample of 1,200 households in each country. Questions are read out in vernacular languages and recorded with the help of programmed tablets. The interviews concentrate on social protection and political trust among the informally employed. While covering other aspects of social reproduction the questionnaire includes a section on self-organization and another on the views of the informal employed on trade unions. Some of the findings on self-organization and the views of the informal labour force on trade unions are presented here.

The surveys have to be put into a clear perspective right from the beginning. The interviews did not focus on persons in informal employment who are already organized by trade unions, whether as individual members or affiliates. The sample relies on a stratification of informal employment in the country as a whole and thus is overwhelmingly made up of respondents who are not union members. Many may be far away from ever being organized by trade unions.<sup>10</sup> Some are organized in cooperatives, clubs, associations and other forms of group, while others remain outside collective interest representation. Our survey represents the views of organized and non-organized informal labour and thus provides a representative profile of the thinking of those in informal employment.

## VIEWS ON TRADE UNIONS OF INFORMAL LABOUR

The interviews on respondents' ›views on trade unions‹ are structured in three different sections. Section I concerns questions on ›knowledge‹ and ›trust‹. Those who have no knowledge about trade unions were excluded from further and deeper questions. Section II thus contains reactions only from those who confirmed having at least a minimal knowledge of trade unions. Questions attended to individual perceptions. What do people in informal employment think about trade unions and their activities? What do they perceive as their roles? Are trade unions important for social affairs and in whose interests do they act? Do respondents have personal experiences with trade unions? And are they interested in joining as a member?

Section III focusses on members of self-organized groups and their interest in joining trade unions not as individual members but as a group. To accentuate the group perspective, those who hold no group membership were ignored and the interview continued only with those who had joined a membership organization.<sup>11</sup> The interviews established whether and how people were interested in affiliating with trade unions with their whole group. What group services would group members expect to receive from an affiliation? Should trade unions have a say in the management of their internal affairs? And should their group pay fees to trade unions for the services it receives?

<sup>10</sup> In selecting a sample with a ›low-union membership‹ profile, we are looking at the views on trade unions of social groups that do not have much awareness of trade union activities.

<sup>11</sup> In a separate section of the interview, respondents assessed their satisfaction with the dealings of their own groupings. The findings will be published in a separate paper.

# 2

## SURVEY PART I: KNOWLEDGE AND TRUST

### TRADE UNIONS – (UN-)KNOWN AND (NOT) TRUSTED?

Are trade unions known to the informal labour force? And are they trusted? Being known and being trusted are two prerequisites before consideration of cooperation can start in earnest. The two questions are interlinked as the level of knowledge may be a factor in determining the level of trust in an organization. We present the findings on knowledge about trade unions before we look at the trust trade unions enjoy. Thereafter, we look at the interplay between the two.

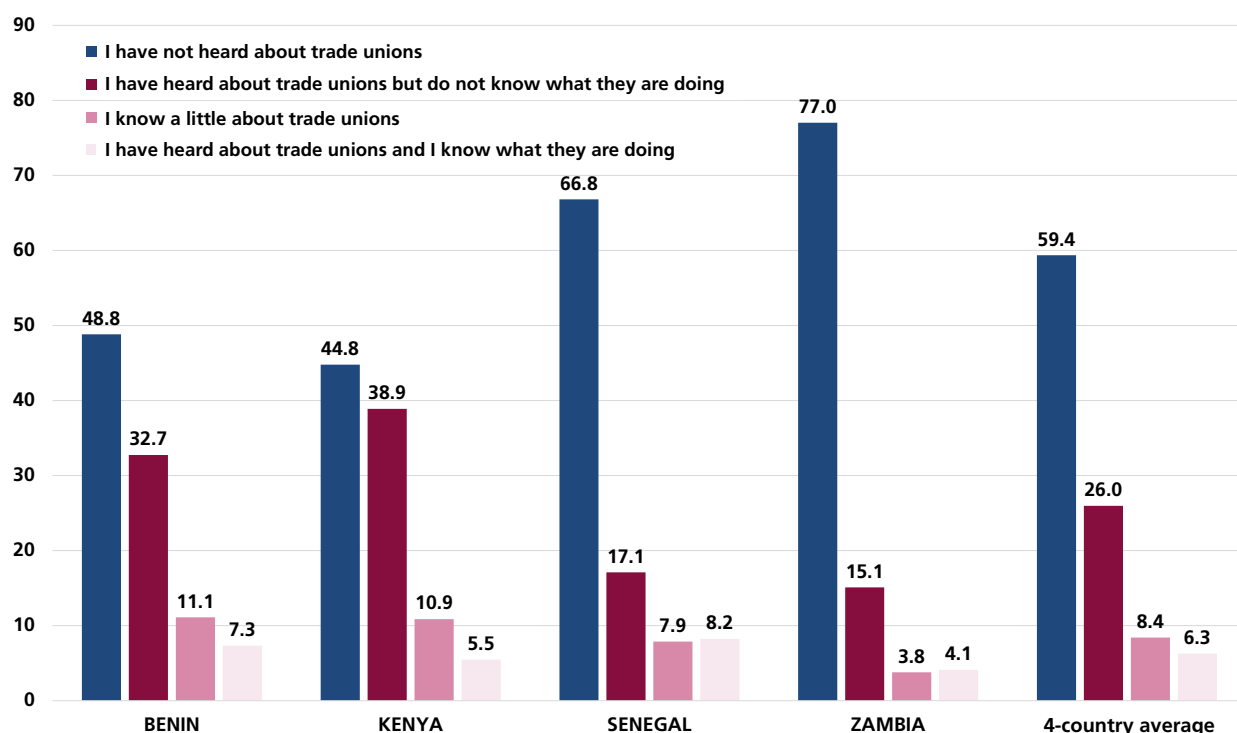
To establish the level of knowledge, we asked as an entry question: *‘Have you ever heard about trade unions and what they do?’* Answer options delineated four different levels of knowledge.

The findings are presented in Figure 1. In a four-country average nearly 60 per cent of respondents declared that they had never heard of trade unions. We asked respondents to select from three knowledge groups (‘heard about them’, ‘know a little’, ‘know what they are doing’).

Those who declared that they had heard the name but did not know more account for 26 per cent of respondents. The remaining 14.7 per cent fall into the other two knowledge categories, which we can label ‘basic knowledge’.

Zambia displays the highest level of ignorance: 77 per cent had never heard of trade unions. Kenya and Benin exhibited a higher level of familiarity, but even in those countries 45 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively, had never heard of them.

Figure 1  
**Four countries – knowledge of trade unions (figures in %)**  
 (Question: ‘Have you ever heard about trade unions and what they do?’)



Note: Mean values - Benin 1.77; Kenya 1.77; Senegal 1.58; Zambia 1.35. Range of values: Min=1; Max=4.  
 Benin N=1188; Kenya N=1188; Senegal N=1193; Zambia N=1192

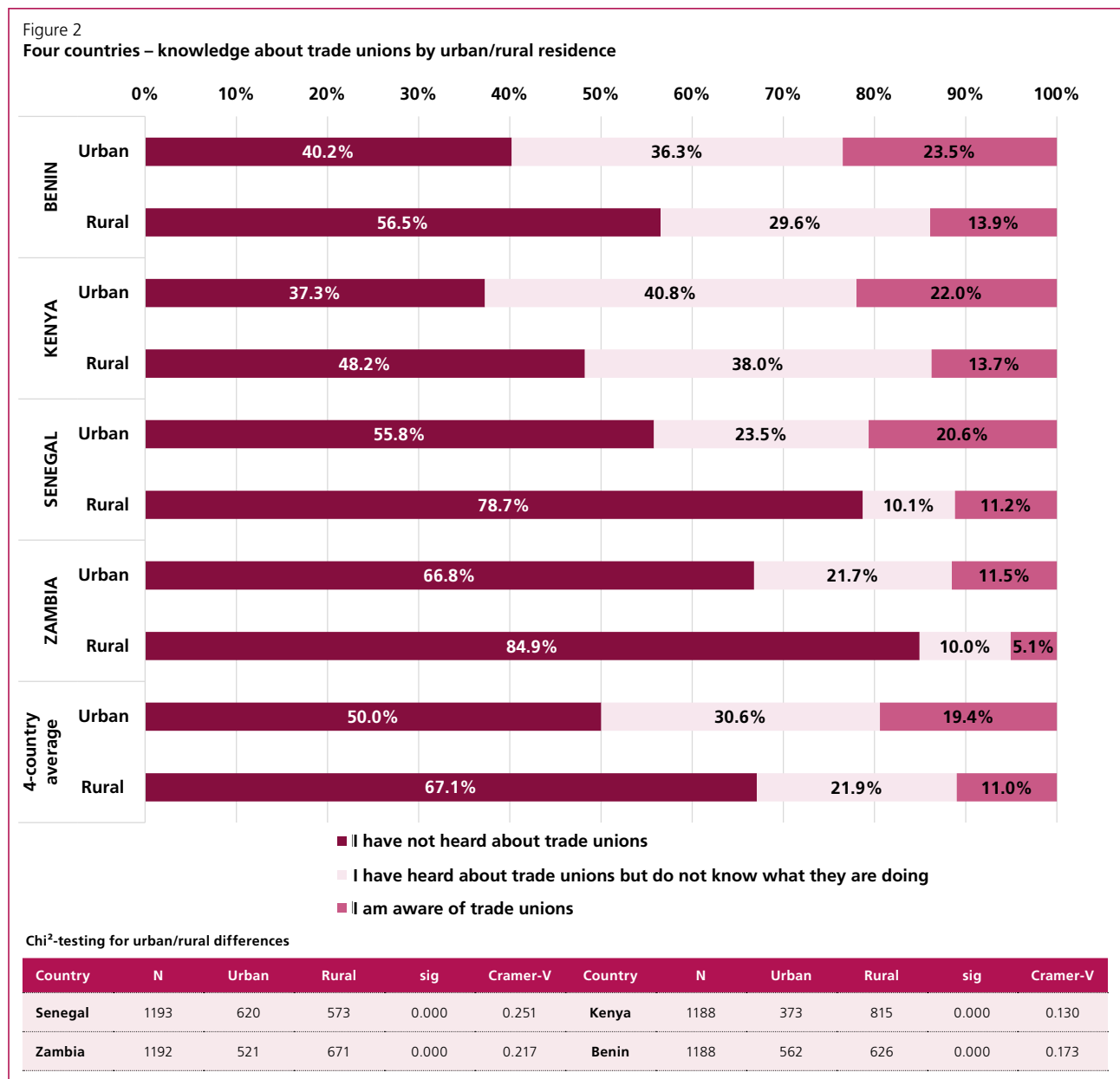
Trade unions concentrate their activities on urban areas and the urban population should have a higher awareness of them. Taking into consideration the residence factor, we get an allocation of votes as indicated in Figure 2. In a four-country average, 19.4 per cent of the urban population had a basic knowledge of trade unions (answer options 3 and 4), while 11.0 per cent of rural dwellers stated their familiarity. The higher urban knowledge of trade unions is a significant feature in all four countries, with the differences expressed most strongly in Senegal (Cramer-V 0.251), followed by Zambia and Benin. Kenya has a rural population with the lowest knowledge gap in relation to urban inhabitants.

ment groups are statistically significant, but only at a low level. In Zambia, no statistical significance is observed. It is therefore not possible to talk of a strongly manifested ›status‹ or ›class consciousness‹. In addition to the general lack of information on trade unions, the structural fluidity that keeps people ›migrating‹ between employment groups may explain the low level of distinctions when it comes to knowledge of trade unions.

### LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF TRADE UNIONS

Figure 3 presents the knowledge gap with regard to trade unions by employment status. In general, ›own-account workers‹ show the lowest level of knowledge. In Kenya, employers are the best-informed group, while in the three other countries, employees have the best level of knowledge of trade unions. Overall, the differences between the employ-

One might ask whether a percentage of 59.4 per cent of respondents (average of four countries) who have never heard of trade unions is a high or a low level of ignorance. There are several answers to this. First, a low level of knowledge may be expected. Trade unions are (or should be) special interest groups that act first and foremost in the interests of



their members. Our research focus on informal employment produces a sample bias in that own-account workers make up the majority. We are thus asking a sample that is composed of groups socio-structurally ›distant‹ from trade unions and a high level of ›ignorance‹ or ›uninterest‹ with regard to trade union affairs may be expected.

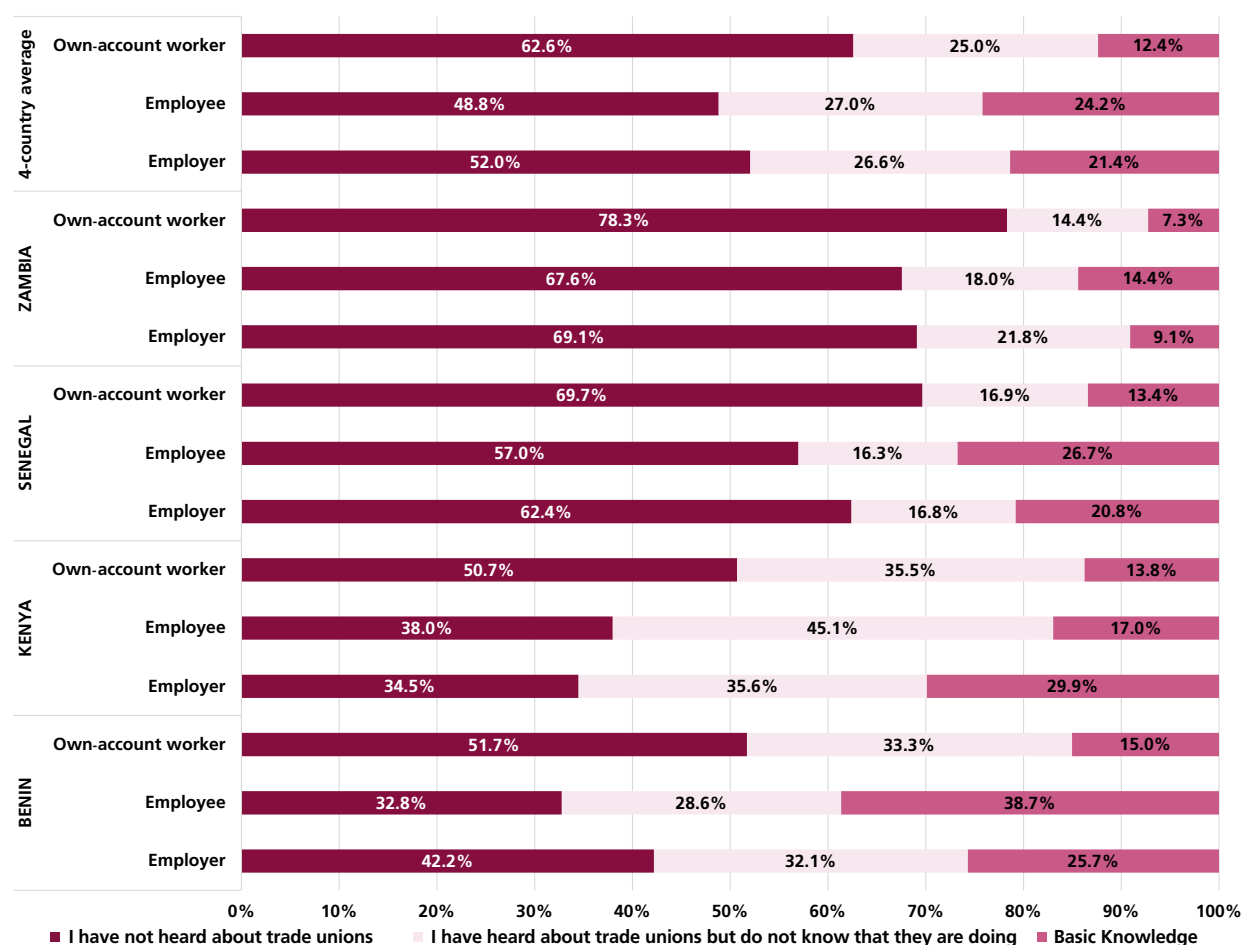
Second, trade unions and their activities – including strikes – are predominantly focused on urban areas. Understandably, the rate of positive answers is substantially higher if we distinguish between urban and rural dwellers. Having said that, the rates do not even double. On average, only less than a quarter of Benin’s and Kenya’s urban population in informal employment have some knowledge of trade unions.

Third, the level of national awareness of trade unions is certainly linked to their socio-political activities and national posture. Unions are not mere special interest groups that act

exclusively when their members’ interests are at stake, but may also develop a national agenda when it comes to political issues, in particular in relation to the defence of democratic rights and values. Sometimes trade unions may call for demonstrations – or join others – when they see a need to oppose plans or intentions of the government or political parties. In such cases, trade unions try to gain national support, mobilize beyond their organizational boundaries, develop particular national features, and in doing so may become known or even popular to other segments of the population.

Benin is a case in point. Its urban segment showed the highest level of familiarity with trade unions of all countries in our sample (23.5 per cent). In recent years, trade unions in Benin have engaged in month-long strike actions (January–April 2018) against the government in the health and education sectors. These strikes affected the daily lives of many urban dwellers (and not only of members of trade unions).

Figure 3  
Four countries – knowledge of trade unions by employment status



Chi<sup>2</sup>-testing for differences in knowledge of trade unions by employment status

Country	N	sig.	Cramer-V	Country	N	sig.	Cramer-V
Senegal	1193	0.000	0.095	Kenya	1156	0.000	0.095
Zambia	1179	0.062	0.068	Benin	1162	0.000	0.120

During times of deep conflict and public protest actions, the level of knowledge of what trade unions are and do should be on the increase. One may add, however, that Benin's government countered industrial action, putting heavy pressure on media (TV, radio, newspaper) not to report on conflicts. This prevented the spread of information beyond those immediately involved in the conflicts. The informal economy however, could have used word-of-mouth communication to compensate for the government ban and debate what is happening in important sectors of society. However, it appears that such discussions on trade union action did not reach many segments of the informally employed. For Benin, with its enduring government–trade union conflicts over many years, the low level of knowledge of trade union affairs by the urban segments of the informally employed is somewhat surprising.

Our survey did not venture into the reasons for the low level of publicity concerning what trade unions are doing. We may, however, assume that this is largely owing to inadequate campaign policies on the part of trade unions themselves. When social conflicts arise involving government in one way or the other, it is to be expected that government-owned media or those influenced by government do not report extensively or positively on trade union actions or may even obstruct the public from knowing of what is hap-

pening. In that case, trade unions themselves have to step in and organize their own information campaigns. If they do not, their actions remain obscure to the public. A low level of public interest campaigns and a deficient publicity policy may be key reasons for the rather low level of trade union knowledge even in urban places.

### LEVEL OF TRUST IN TRADE UNIONS

Knowledge about trade unions may be low; but what about trust? Do those who know about trade unions trust them? The responses to our question ›How much do you trust trade unions?‹<sup>12</sup> are shown in Figure 4. In all countries, the level of ›non-trust‹ is higher than that of ›trust‹. In a four-country average, 28.2 per cent of respondents have ›no trust at all‹ and another 18.4 per cent state ›just a little‹. Together, the mistrust-camp (46.6 per cent) in the four countries far outnumbers the trust-camp (26.5 per cent).

<sup>12</sup> The actual question was: ›How much do you trust each of the following actors?‹ This was followed by a list of 10 organizations/institutions, including ›the president, ›national government, ›traditional leaders, ›trade unions. In this publication we discuss only the level of trust/non-trust with regard to trade unions. The ›trust hierarchy, which compares all organizations/institutions, is discussed in another publication.

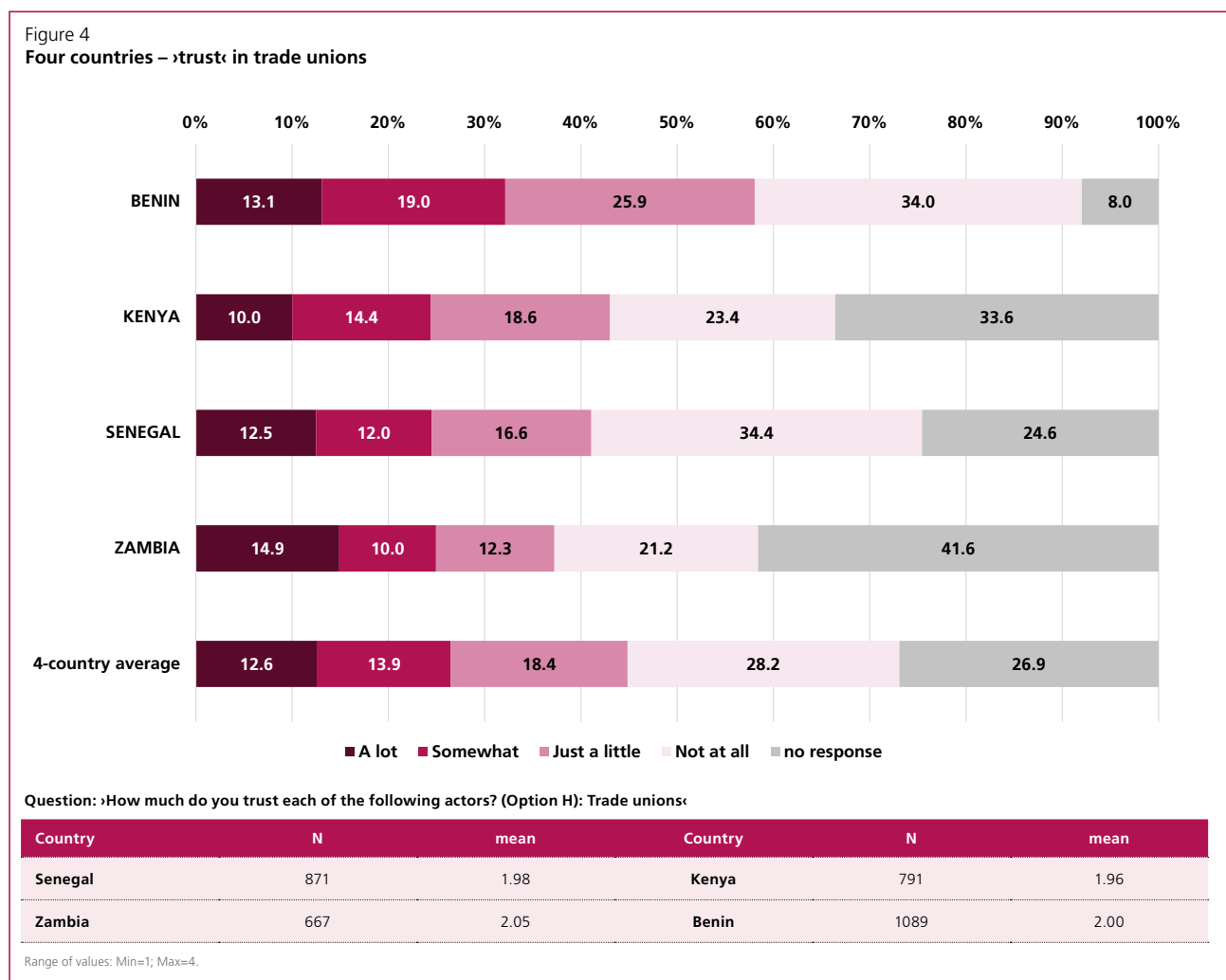


Figure 5  
Four countries – trust and non-trust on the part of those who have not heard of trade unions

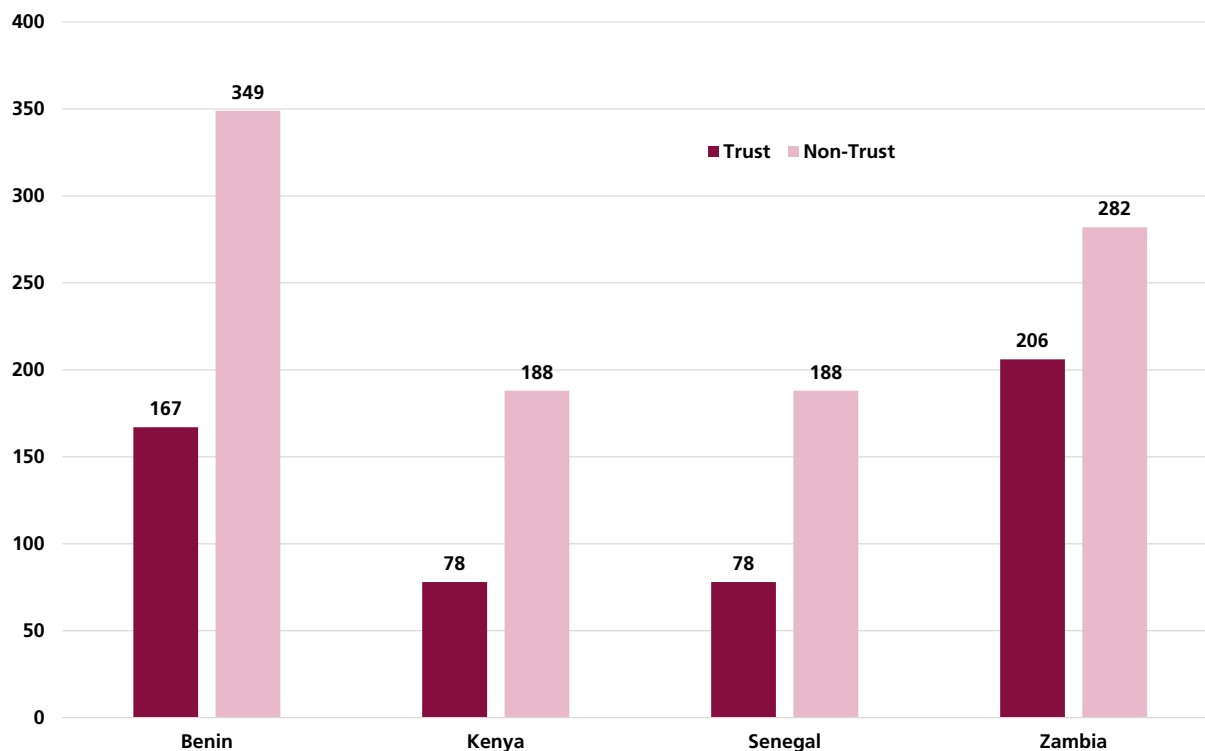
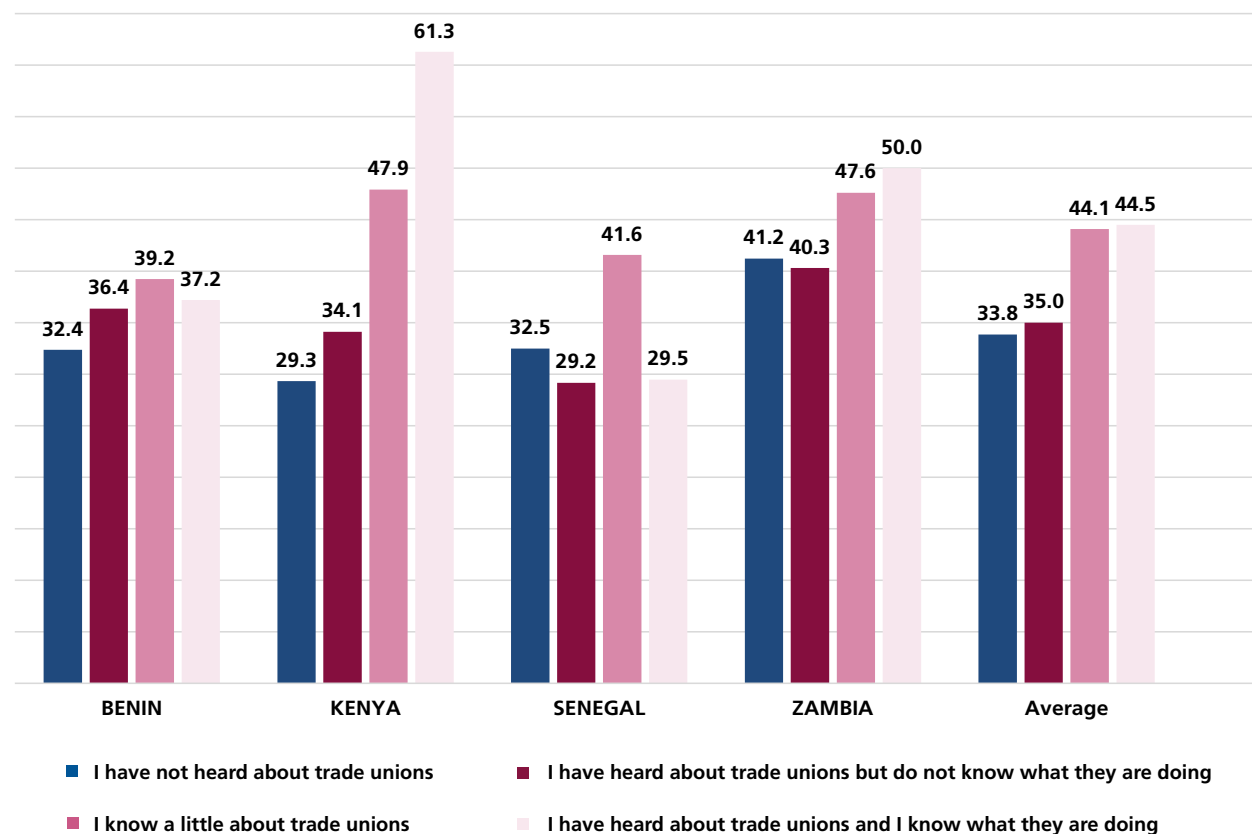


Figure 6  
Four countries – trust in trade unions by intensity of knowledge of them (figures in %)



Benin N=1097; Kenya N=789; Senegal N=900; Zambia N=698

What is immediately striking is the high number of ›no response‹ answers. The low level of knowledge kept many respondents from assessing an organization they do not know much or anything about. The number of respondents who abstained, however, is much lower than the number of those who declared that they had never heard of trade unions. Altogether, just over every second person (54.7 per cent) who stated that they did not even know the term ›trade union‹ did not hesitate to give a verdict. In most cases, this verdict was one of ›non-trust‹ (see Figure 5).

How can we interpret a declaration of ›trust‹ or ›no trust‹ concerning organizations that are unknown? A ›no trust‹ response could mean that people are declaring a mistrust in things they do not know about. The unknown may be seen as something against which one should act with caution. The same logic could be applied to the other side. A judgement of ›trust‹ concerning what one does not know about could reflect an attitude that assumes that what exists, exists for a reason. In both cases, we are confronted with elements of a public image of trade unions that do not rely on experience or knowledge.

Cross-tabulating the two variables discloses the extent to which trust is positively influenced by knowledge (see Figure 6). Benin and Senegal show a pattern of voting in which ›trust‹ does not change when ›knowledge of trade unions‹ changes. Those who know a lot about trade unions do not have a better opinion than those who know little. In both countries, the ›mistrust level‹ is high and remains unaffected when information becomes available about trade unions. Trade unions appear to be stuck with a negative public image, which may call for substantial counter-information from trade unions if they want to improve their trust-rating.

In Zambia, trust in trade unions increases when more is known about them. The gain in trust is marginal, however, and mistrust remains the dominant assessment, even in groups with a good knowledge. A strong positive correlation is observed only for Kenya. The more people know about trade unions there, the higher they rate them. Kenya is the only country in which unions become trustworthy in the eyes of a majority, if they are known.



## 3

## SURVEY PART II: INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS OF TRADE UNIONS<sup>13</sup>

### IMPORTANCE OF TRADE UNIONS

To understand how people in informal employment see the relevance of trade unions in society, we confronted respondents with six categorical statements,<sup>14</sup> which they were asked to assess in terms of ›fully disagree‹, ›mostly disagree‹, ›partly agree/partly disagree‹, ›mostly agree‹ and ›fully agree‹. For easier presentation of results, we developed an opinion index, which defines ›agree‹ as the sum of ›fully agree‹ and ›mostly agree‹, and ›disagree‹ as the sum of ›fully disagree‹ and ›mostly disagree‹. In subtracting one from the other we get a net opinion, which becomes positive when more agree than disagree, and negative, if the opposite is the case.

The findings are shown in Figure 7. The overall pattern of responses discloses similarities between the countries, even though the intensity of support or rejection may differ. All four countries have a strong majority for three of the statements: strong affirmation for ›in general, trade unions are important organizations‹ and ›it would be good if trade unions became stronger‹; and similar strong denial for ›trade unions in your country should be banned‹. The support in Kenya, Zambia and Benin is nearly universal, while Senegal has a strong pro-union posture of two-thirds of respondents and rejection by a minority of some 20 per cent.

A positive picture was also confirmed when we asked about the achievements of trade unions. A clear majority<sup>15</sup> in all

countries subscribed to the view that trade unions have a positive impact and ›help to improve the social situation for many people‹. Some scepticism creeps in, however. The opinion on achievements is not so overwhelmingly enthusiastic as the support for the importance of trade unions. Kenya maintains an overwhelming positive assessment but in Zambia (32.6 per cent) and Senegal (39.9 per cent), large number of respondents denied a positive impact, so that the majority shrinks.

Criticism of performance widened and became substantial when we asked about inefficiency and corruption. The statement ›trade unions are efficient‹ received mainly divided opinions. In Kenya, 49.5 per cent as against 29.4 per cent still identified unions as efficient organizations, but in the other three countries, supporters and deniers of the statement were more evenly balanced.

The statement about corruption produced the widest spread of views between countries. In Benin, a strong majority (65.8 per cent against 28.3 per cent) assessed trade unions as corrupt, while in Zambia, a good majority (54 per cent against 24 per cent) denied this in relation to their unions. In Kenya and Senegal, the two camps were of similar strength.

Overall, where the informally employed have a basic knowledge of trade unions, their perception of them is fairly positive in all countries. There is a high acceptance of trade unions' organizational relevance and overwhelming support for having strong unions in the country. Conversely, respondents expressed criticisms indicating that they want trade unions to improve how they perform their duties. This points to the conclusion that trade unionism as a principle is fully endorsed, while the manner in which it is practiced is not supported to the same extent.

### ORGANIZATIONAL INDEPENDENCE OF TRADE UNIONS FROM GOVERNMENTS

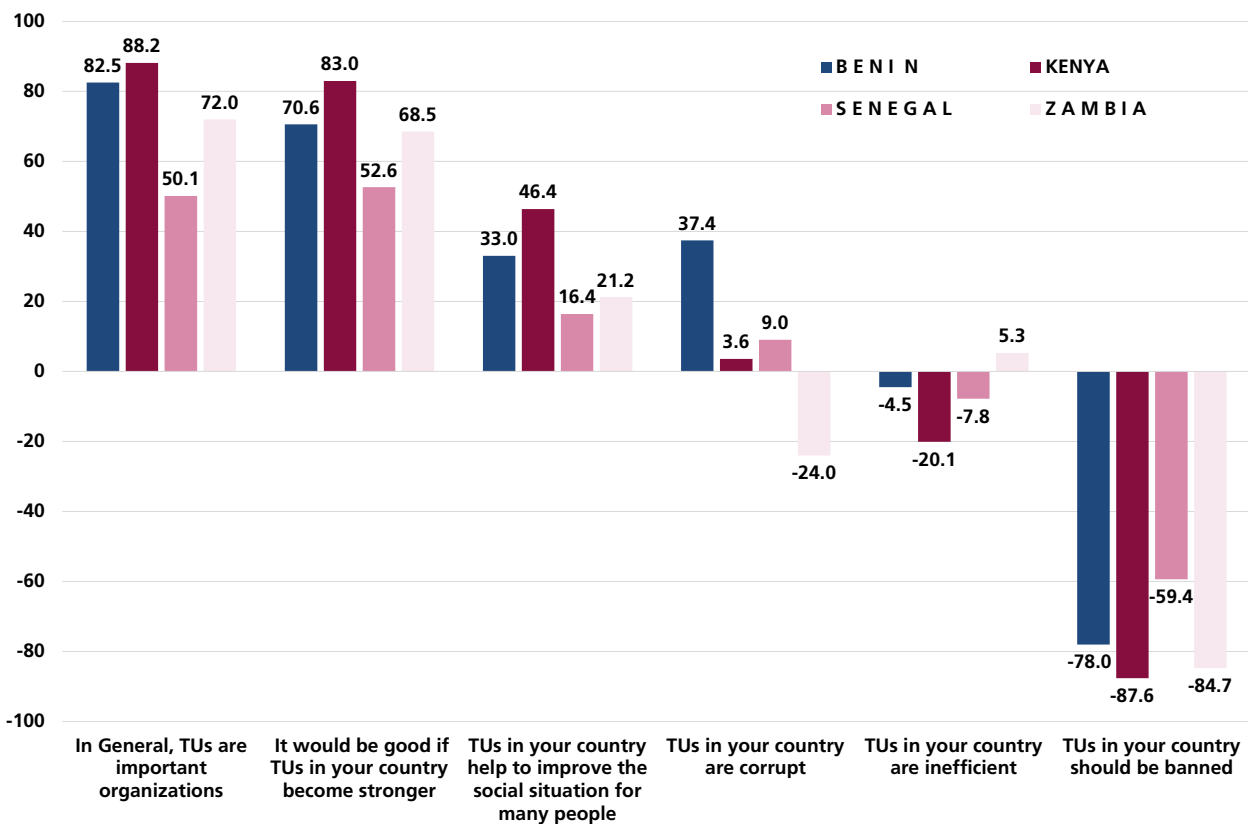
None of the previous questions touched on the trade unions' operational base. We tried to get a better understanding of how their mode of operation is perceived by asking about organizational autonomy. Are unions seen as bodies that operate independently of the government? Or are they observed as depending on government?

<sup>13</sup> From this point on interviews were ended if respondents stated that they were not aware of the existence of trade unions. It should be pointed out that we took different approaches in the four countries. For countries in the first survey year, that is Benin and Kenya, we also abandoned the interviews if respondents stated that they know trade unions only by name. For countries in the second survey year (Senegal and Zambia), we continued the interview even if we received this response. The slight asymmetry in the approaches has little impact on the findings, however.

<sup>14</sup> To avoid suggestive questions, with their tendency to attract affirmative answers, three statements were formulated as negative opinions on trade unions, together with three positive ones. Questions with positive or negative connotations were asked at intervals, forcing respondents each time to reflect on the statement from a different angle, sometimes answering in the affirmative and in other cases in the negative to express their views.

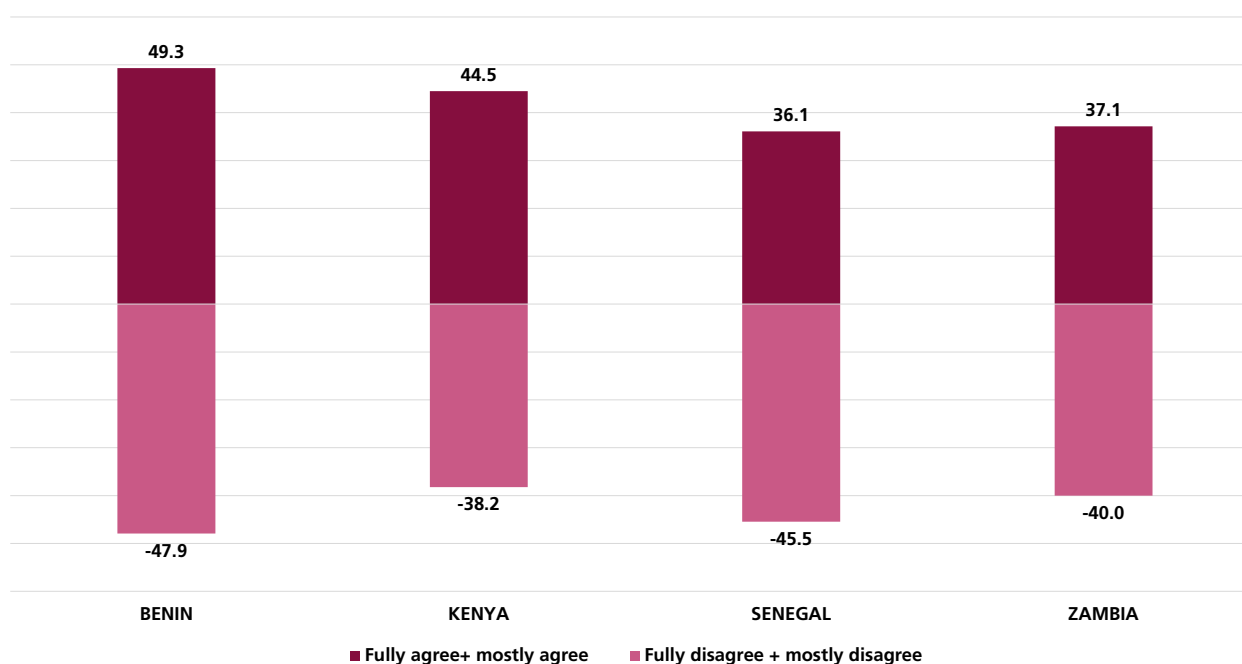
<sup>15</sup> To avoid misunderstandings, we reconfirm that most of this part of the paper refers only to those who have a basic knowledge of trade unions and not to the whole informal labour force.

Figure 7  
**Four countries – evaluating trade unions by six criteria**  
 Index (%): agree (fully+mostly) – disagree (fully+mostly)



Question: >We have listed below several statements about trade unions and want to know, if you agree or disagree. Please tell us for each statement, if you fully agree; mostly agree; partly agree/partly disagree; mostly disagree; fully disagree: A. In general, trade unions are important organizations; B. Trade unions in (your country) are inefficient; C. Trade unions (in your country) help to improve the social situation for many people; D. Trade unions (in your country) are corrupt; E. It would be good if trade unions (in your country) became stronger; F. Trade unions (in your country) should be banned.<

Figure 8  
**Four countries – perceived independence of trade unions from government (%)**



Question: >Do you agree with the following statement: Trade unions (in your country) are independent of the government?<  
 Mean value: Benin 3.02; Kenya 3.05; Senegal 2.84; Zambia 3.02. Range of values: Min=1; Max=5.

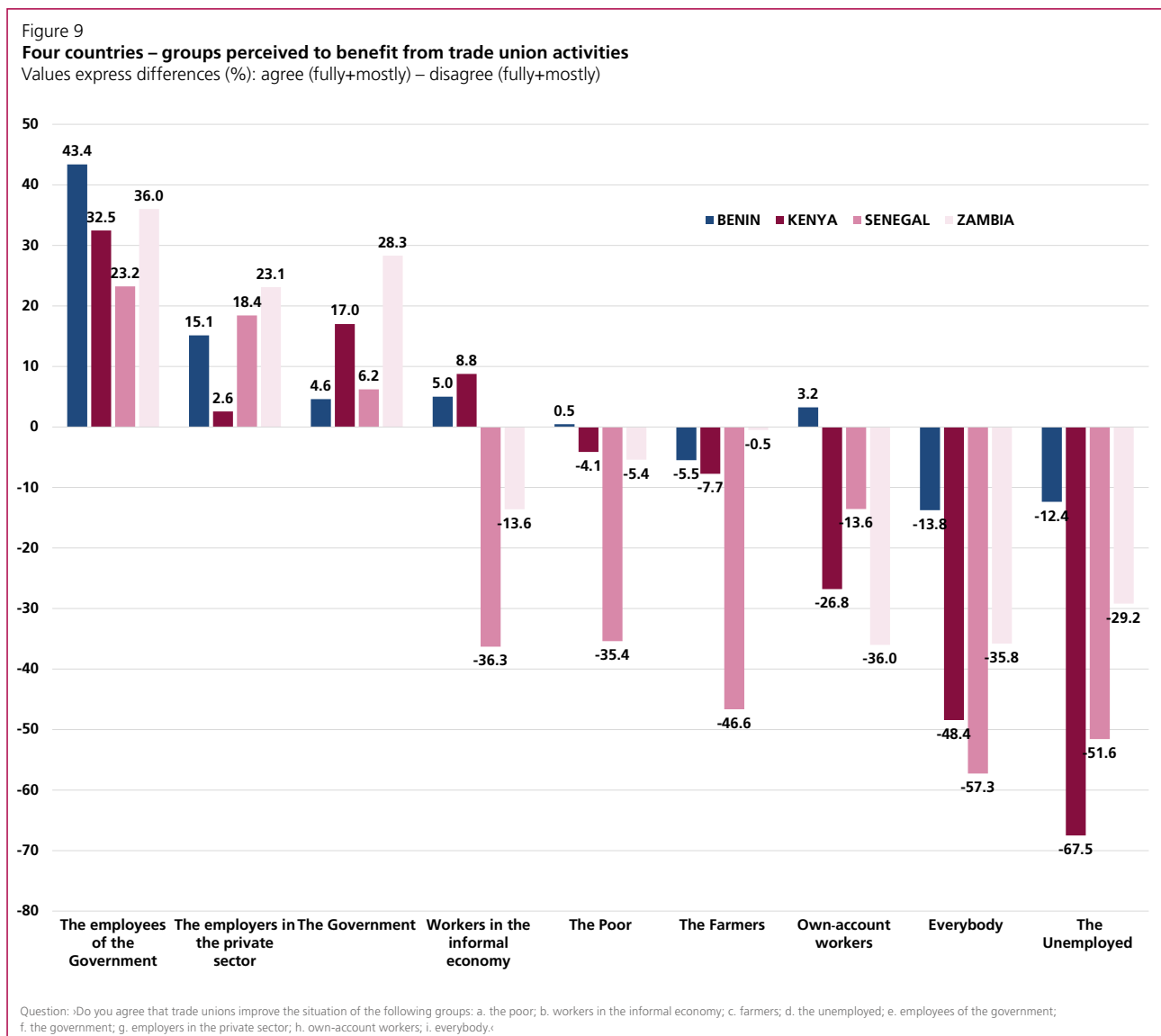
The statement on trade union independence produces a split perception (see Figure 8). Benin and Zambia come out with two camps of equal weight, while Kenya has a small majority leaning in favour of independence and Senegal one in favour of dependence. The differences are marginal, however.

We did not try to unearth detailed opinions on organizational autonomy, as respondents with a mainly low level of knowledge of trade unions may not have a good understanding of the legal and financial procedures that guide trade unions in running their affairs.<sup>16</sup> Instead, we approach this matter in a different way in the next section. Here, it is sufficient to note that the camp of those who perceive that trade unions are operationally dependent on government is rather large and about as strong as that of those who believe in trade union independence.

<sup>16</sup> This could be done by asking about government funding of trade unions, legal provisions that restrict autonomy, exchanges of personnel between the two or by other means.

## TRADE UNIONS AS ACTORS – WHOM DO THEY HELP?

Trade unions are member organizations and it may be believed obvious whose interests they represent and whom they help. Special interest groups act in the interests of their members and help to improve their livelihoods. But unions often engage on issues that reach beyond the immediate interests of their members. Whereas collective bargaining on wages and working conditions can be treated as a member interest activity, calling for minimum wage increases already goes beyond the membership base. So does a union’s positioning on trade policy issues, where the socio-economic base may be widened to include even the social interests of non-wage earners. This is also the case when trade unions call for reforms of sectors with social policy relevance, such as health care and education. Finally, unions may engage in political reforms without an immediate social agenda, for example, when they call for the defence of democratic rights or mobilize for the reform of the political system. Here, they leave a special interest platform behind and enter into a national agenda.



There are basically two ways of asking ›whom do trade unions help?. One way links a specific reform or policy issue to particular beneficiaries. But reforms or policy issues are usually country-specific and not stable over time; they cannot form the basis for cross-country comparisons. The other way is to ask about the beneficiaries of trade union actions in general. This is the approach taken here. We want to know whether trade unions are seen as ›class-based‹ organizations and which groups they help. We have listed several social and political actors as potential beneficiaries. To widen the spectrum, the list presented to respondents included groups and socio-political actors who are usually not seen as union clientele but as more distant groups, such as farmers, or even union adversaries such as employers.

Which groups are promoted by trade unions? Respondents in all countries exhibit majority support for three groups: first come ›government employees‹, followed by ›private sector employers‹ and ›the government‹ (see Figure 9).

In all countries, two groups are strongly rejected. The strongest rejection is of ›the unemployed‹, followed by ›everybody‹. ›Own-account workers‹ are seen in three countries as not a clientele for trade unions, while in Benin, about half of respondents are of the view that trade unions already take care of them.

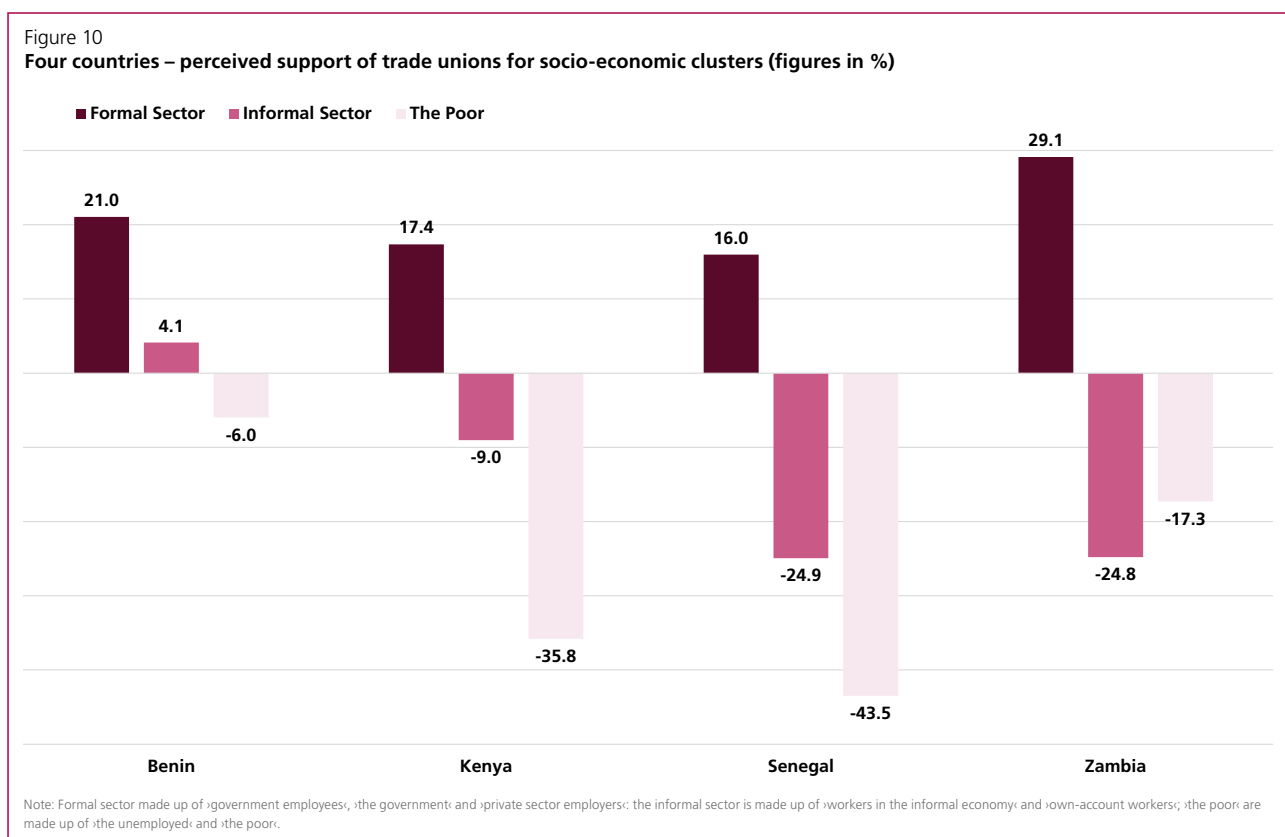
Opinions diverge as far as the other social groups are concerned. Senegalese respondents oppose the view that trade unions care for the interests of ›farmers‹, ›the poor‹ and ›workers in the informal economy. Respondents in the oth-

er three countries are mostly undecided and split their views into YES and NO camps of equal strength.

Seeing ›private sector employers‹ and ›the government‹ as beneficiaries, just like ›government employees‹ leads to the conclusion that employers and employees are not considered embedded in adversarial employment relations. Respondents rather subscribe to the view that trade unions help both sides.<sup>17</sup> Trade unions are not perceived as conflict agents which act only in the interest of employees, but as organizations who form a common bond linking the two. This is the basic concept of a transmission belt. Differences between employees and (government as) employer are blurred, adversarial relations dissipate and what remains is the world of ›better living‹ to which government, government employees and trade unions alike belong. The actual divide is not employer versus employee but formal sector<sup>18</sup> versus informal sector. A majority of the informal labour force regards trade unions as an organizational transmission belt for the benefit of groups in the formal sector.

The social class profiling can be simplified by regrouping the various groups into three socio-economic clusters, namely the formal sector, the informal sector and the poor (see the definition in the footnote to Figure 10). The findings are summarized in Figure 10.

- <sup>17</sup> This further substantiates our previous findings where around half of respondents denied organizational separation between trade unions and the government.
- <sup>18</sup> The term ›formal sector‹ is used metaphorically and not to refer to the formal economy.



The formal sector versus the informal sector clearly forms a dividing line. All countries show a dichotomous understanding of trade unions as acting in favour of the formal sector and less for the benefit of social groups in the informal sector. This dichotomy is least prominent in Benin, but rather strongly articulated in Senegal and Zambia. Kenya is positioned in the middle.

The same can be said about trade unions and the poor. With the exception of Benin, where views are split, the three other countries clearly see trade unions as not taking care of the poor. This allows us to reconsider an earlier finding. On a previous question, majorities in all four countries declared that trade unions ›help to improve the social situation of many people‹. The responses to the new question seem to indicate that many do not see trade unions as taking care of the poor segments of society, namely ›the unemployed‹, ›own-account workers‹, ›the poor‹ and ›workers in the informal economy‹.

The orientation towards the formal sector should, however, not distract us from the point that large numbers of respondents also credit trade unions with taking care of the interests of ›workers in the informal economy‹. In Benin and Kenya, such views are even put forward by a slight majority, while in Senegal and Zambia more than 30 per cent support such a view.

The views of so many appear to be extraordinarily positive and not rooted in practices on the ground. In Benin, ›workers in the informal economy‹ have been the recruitment target for a number of years and central organizations such as the ›Union Nationale des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Benin‹ (UNSTB) appear to be doing quite well.<sup>19</sup> But in Kenya, the Kenya Congress of Trade Unions (KCTU) declared its readiness to campaign for the membership of informal workers only in 2019.

The high numbers with which trade unions are accredited as already taking care of ›workers in the informal economy‹, can hardly be related to actual trade union activities. Instead, trade unions appear to enjoy a leap of faith, which is founded more on the hope that they may arrive and take care of informal labour interests than on what they actually do on the ground. Trade unions can take advantage of such ›trust credit‹ when entering the informal economy in earnest.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The UNSTB records their membership base for 2017 as follows: of the 84,526 members, 71 per cent belong to informal affiliated unions. Source: Uhlandssekretariat Labour Market Profile – Benin, 2018, pp. 1–2; available at: [https://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Benin\\_imp\\_2018.pdf](https://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Benin_imp_2018.pdf) (visited 20.8.2020).

<sup>20</sup> It is not the aim of this survey to assess the extent to which the views of informal labour ›correctly‹ reflect the doings of trade unions ›on the ground‹. We cannot decide whether the perception is ›inconsistent‹ and expresses (partly) an uninformed understanding on the part of our respondents; or whether it mirrors (at least in part) trade union activities in the respective countries.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH TRADE UNIONS AND INTEREST IN MEMBERSHIP

Personal experience is one way of developing knowledge of trade unions and becoming familiar with their aims and activities. Personal experience can build on acquaintance with trade unionists<sup>21</sup> and participation in union activities. By asking about contacts and attending activities we can derive an understanding of the extent to which views on trade union are based on personal experience.

Personal contacts are not a significant source on which views on trade unions are based. Nor have many members of the informal labour force participated in trade union activities. On average, only about 10 per cent of respondents refer to contacts with trade unionists. And only 12 per cent have ever attended a union activity (see Figure 11). This differs between countries, but nowhere does the contact level rise above 15 per cent and participation in activities above 17 per cent. The large majority of members of the informal workforce, who have some knowledge of trade unions, did not obtain this information through direct contact but have used other sources to develop a picture.

If we relate the group of respondents with personal contacts to our full sample of informal employment, we find on average in the four countries, 2.3 per cent who have had contacts with trade unionists and 2.7 per cent who have attended activities. Seen from this perspective, we may conclude that many parts of the informal economy by-and-large have been ignored by trade unions. No significant union activities in the informal economy can be noted and no large-scale contact campaign is easily discernible.

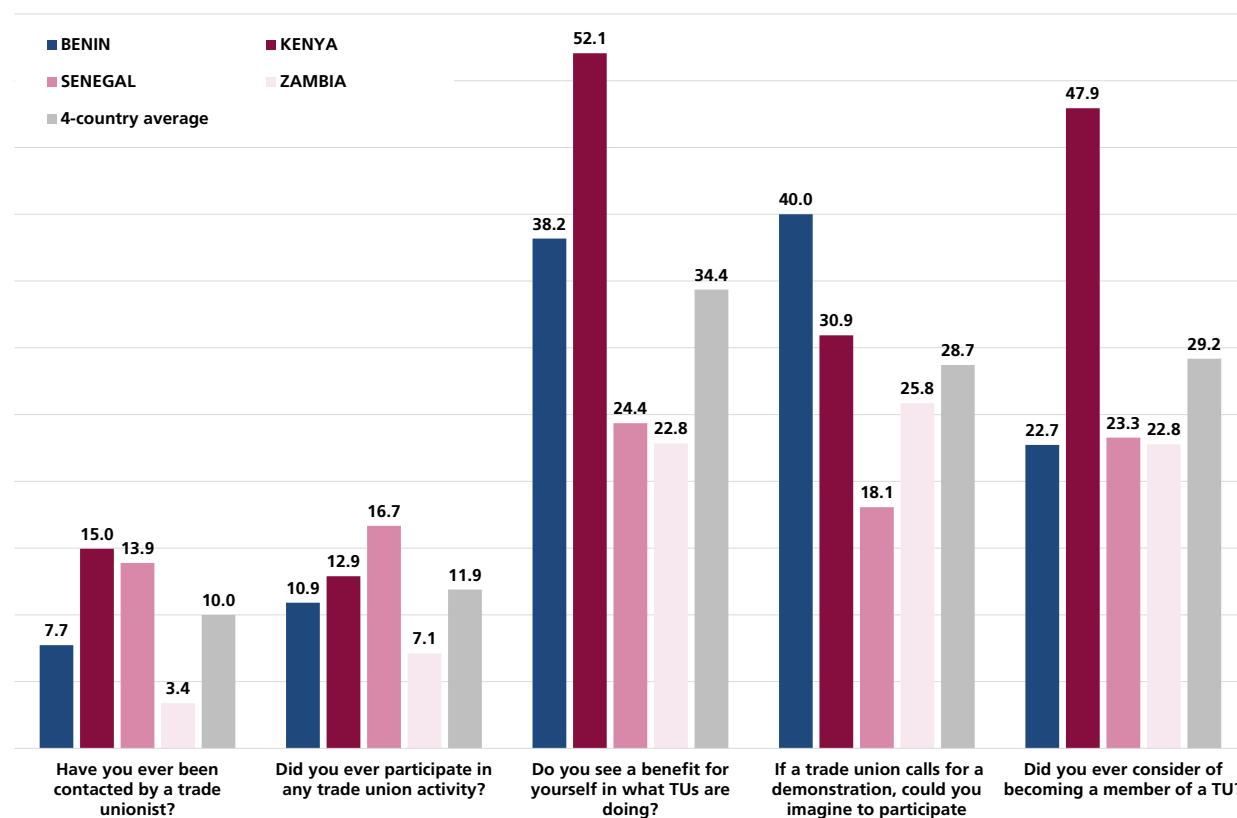
Having no personal experience does not mean that there is no interest in unionism. When we asked about people's interest in attending a union activity in future the picture becomes more favourable. ›Would you consider participating in a trade union demonstration‹ received a ›yes‹ from on average 28.7 per cent, which is more than double those who previously attended an activity. The leap is rather large for Benin (40 per cent), Kenya (30.9 per cent) and Zambia (25.8 per cent) and only in Senegal do we see the same level as in the past.

If respondents are asked to go a step further and consider membership, a surprisingly high average of 29.2 per cent could envision becoming a trade unionist. In Benin, Senegal and Zambia, this share lies at 23 per cent but in Kenya it jumps to 47.9 per cent.

The responses to the next questions shed some light on why people may want to join a union. Roughly the same number of respondents who considered membership an option see a personal benefit in what trade unions do. Only Benin deviates from this picture in that many who see a personal benefit from what trade unions do, do not want to join one as a member.

<sup>21</sup> Contacts may have a family basis as many families cut across formal–informal boundaries and have members in both.

Figure 11

**Four countries – personal experience with trade unions and interest in membership (figures in %)**


Question: Talking specifically about yourself: A. Have you ever been contacted by a trade unionist? B. Did you ever participate in any trade union activity? C. Do you see a benefit for yourself in what trade unions are doing? D. If a trade union calls for a demonstration, could you consider to participate? E. Did you ever consider becoming a member of a trade union?

Table 2

**Interest of informal labour force in trade union membership**

	Benin	Kenya	Senegal	Zambia
Total labour force (TLF)	4,862,455	21,190,309	4,328,681*	7,456,765
Unemployment	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
Total employment (TE)	4,862,455	21,190,309	4,328,681	7,456,765
Informal employment (IE) – share of TE	94.5 %	85.0 % (est.)	91.2 %	87.9 %
Informal employment (IE) - absolute	4,595,020	18,000,000	3,947,757	6,554,496
Interest in TU membership – share of IE	4.2 %	7.8 %	7.6 %	4.7 %
Interest in TU membership – absolute**	200,000	1,400,000	300,000	300,000
Membership in trade unions***	297,000	1,000,000– 1,500,000	85,000	234,000

Notes: \* WDI report TLF in 2019 for Senegal lower than for Benin, even though the population of Senegal is 15.85 million while that of Benin is only 11.48 million. TLF for Senegal appears to be calculated in different ways, which hinders the comparability of TLF size between countries. \*\* To allow for statistical errors, figures are rounded to the nearest 100,000. \*\*\* Figures for trade union membership are notoriously unreliable and outdated. They usually are based on self-reporting by trade unions. Unions have a tendency to set figures on the higher side to indicate organizational strength, and on the lower side if they have to pay fees to other organizations. Figures can only be seen as rough approximations. For Kenya, a figure of below a million may be more realistic.

Source: TLF figures from WDI (2019); IE share taken from ILO (2019, Table B5), for Kenya: personal estimate; Interest of workers in informal employment in trade union membership taken from FES survey; figures on trade union membership are derived from various sources: for Senegal and Zambia, figures are provided as density share of formal sector employment in 'Statistics on union membership', available at: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/union-membership/> (accessed on 31.7.2020) – Zambia (2014) density: 25.9% / Senegal (2015) density: 22.4% ; for Kenya figures available at: <https://alrei.org/education/assessment-of-the-state-of-trade-unions-in-kenya-by-owidhi-george-otieno> (accessed on 31.7.2020) or from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central\\_Organization\\_of\\_Trade\\_Unions\\_\(Kenya\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Organization_of_Trade_Unions_(Kenya)) appear much too high; for Benin: Danish Trade Union Development Agency, Benin Labour Market Profile 2018: 2.

## INTEREST IN TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP – GETTING THE FIGURES RIGHT

At this point it appears appropriate to put our survey findings into a wider perspective. Whether they had an interest in trade union membership or not was asked only of those groups in our sample who stated that they have some knowledge of trade unions. If we change the reference to the whole sample, which is representative of the whole informal labour force, we arrive at the following membership figures: Benin 4.2 per cent, Kenya 7.8 per cent, Senegal 7.6 per cent and Zambia 4.7 per cent.

Using the data for the share of informal employment in total employment in the country, these percentages can be calculated in terms of absolute figures (see Table 2). These figures are approximations as we do not have good data for unemployment.

The ›interest in membership‹ among the informal labour force is substantial. In Kenya, some 1,400,000 persons are willing to join. For the other countries, the figures range from 200,000 (Benin) to 300,000 (Senegal and Zambia). If we compare the potential membership from the informal labour force with the current trade union membership, which comes mainly from the formal economy, the organizational base of trade unions could be substantively enlarged. Winning over the ›already motivated‹ could easily double the membership of trade unions. Viewed from this angle, the potential is great.

Three issues should be emphasized here:

- The figures on ›interest in trade union membership‹ reflect a social environment of the informal labour force in which trade unions are not (yet) seen as a relevant player. If more information on trade unions becomes available, these figures may shoot up and a much higher percentage of the informally employed may be interested in joining.
- A ›declaration of interest‹ is not the same as actually applying for membership. Triggers and opportunities matter. In the end, an organizing strategy that offers ›interested segments‹ of the informal labour force opportunities to participate in trade union actions may be needed to transform ›declared interest‹ into actual membership.
- Recommendations to trade unions on how to recruit are not a purpose of this study. It is left to trade unions to balance the costs and benefits of different recruitment strategies. What this survey does point out, however, is the fact that despite the generally low level of awareness of trade unionism in many segments of the informal economy and the widespread lack of personal experience with trade unions there is a significant potential for recruitment. Sizeable groups of the informal labour force are sympathetic to trade unions and open to engage if trade unions ›go for them‹.

## 4

## SURVEY PART III: AFFILIATION WITH TRADE UNIONS – INTEREST IN GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Part III of the interview on views on trade unions restructures the survey by modifying the type of questions and the sample of respondents. From here onwards, it refers only to those who are self-organized. The interview is no longer concerned with individuals' perceptions without considering their organizational background. It targets those who are members of an organization, be it a group, a club, an association, a cooperative or some other form of interest amalgamation; and it wants to know what members of these groups think about possible cooperation, if not affiliation of their group with trade unions.

When trade unions reflect on strategies for building an organizational base within the informal workforce, they have to decide between two approaches: recruiting individuals or taking in established groups.

Targeting group membership and affiliating established organizations is a different and more complex approach than recruiting individuals. If individuals are absorbed in a trade union, they are hardly in a position to bargain for specific terms of entry, but have to accept the organizational environment as given. If, however, an established organization with a clear record of aims, duties, statutes and members is trying to affiliate, it may join with the intention of continuing its previous activities with no interest in dismantling its organizational fabric, including leadership structures.<sup>22</sup> One reason for joining a trade union as an affiliate may be to add capacities or services for their own group. Negotiations may take place between a trade union and a potential affiliate to clarify the terms of entry and the services the union is supposed to provide. What obligations, such as payment of dues, will a new affiliate have to shoulder? Will the internal affairs of a new affiliate remain untouched? Or will affiliation lead to internal reform processes, guided by the new parent body?

Understanding the expectations of members of groups that may be targeted by trade unions as potential affiliates is a precondition of laying out the parameters for a successful recruitment campaign. It can also alert unions to the danger of gaining new affiliates that may not produce organization-

al synergies but soon lead to separation again because of unsatisfiable expectations.

The survey tries to obtain a better understanding with regard to three topics, which are key to any discussion of organizational affiliation with trade unions. These are:

- (1) Is there a general interest among group members in cooperating with trade unions?
- (2) What kind of organizational support, if any, do group members expect from trade unions?
- (3) What kind of monetary support are affiliate members willing to provide to trade unions?

One clarification is important to put respondents' answers into perspective. The interview does not establish the ›corporate or collective interest‹ of groups but the perceptions of members. Members' current thinking is one factor that contributes to a collective interest. The structure, recordings and statutes of an organization are a second factor that frame collective identity. And the thinking of the leadership and the strategies it applies to group duties are a third contributor to determining what a group may do. A ›group or collective interest‹ can be determined only if the interplay of the three organizational pillars is considered. By looking at members' views only, we are still far from ascertaining what a group may decide. But members' perceptions are an important factor that group leaders have to take into consideration when deciding about group issues. Our opinion poll thus cannot draw conclusions on what groups may decide if they are offered affiliation by a trade union. However, it can show what members think if such offers are provided.

### THE INTEREST OF GROUPS IN COOPERATING AND AFFILIATING WITH TRADE UNIONS

Asking for ›support‹ or ›affiliation‹ are different ways of linking the future of a group to a trade union. Support can be sought while maintaining organizational autonomy. Even though it implies an asymmetrical relation between a beneficiary and a benefactor, it still establishes cooperation between independent partners; support could focus on a sin-

<sup>22</sup> When leaders of an organization negotiate accession to another organization, they usually demand ›recognition‹ for themselves or do it with the intention of remaining in power.



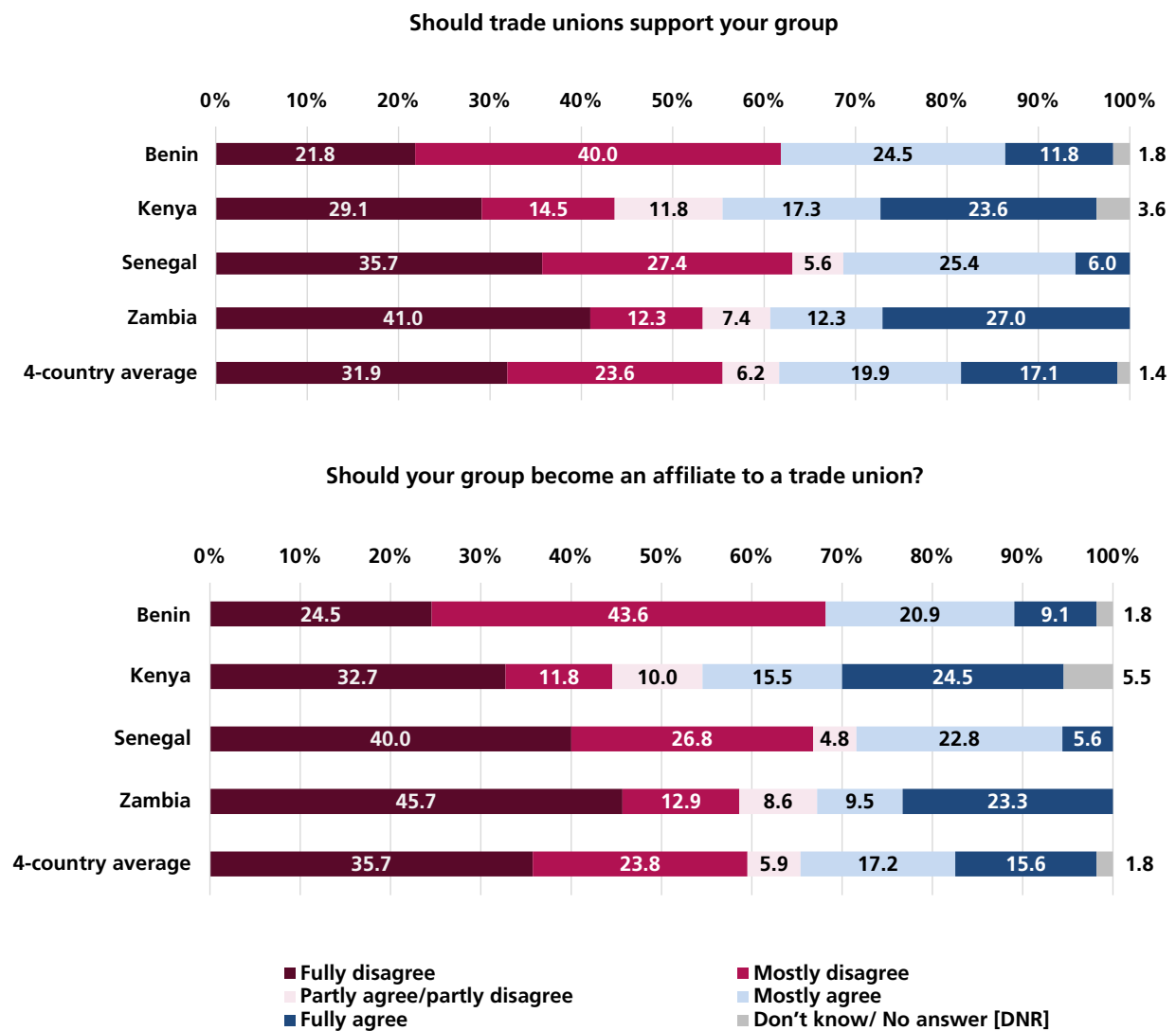
gle project over a short period, pointing to a temporary relationship. ›Affiliation‹ goes deeper as it implies giving up some form of organizational autonomy, accepting the obligations that come with membership and putting the new relationship on a more permanent basis.

To distinguish between the two approaches to cooperation, we asked respondents about them. Figure 12 summarizes the responses. On average among the four countries, a ma-

majority of 55.5 per cent object to the idea of accepting ›support‹ from trade unions for the benefit of their group. This leaves a significant minority of 37 per cent who are affirmative and look positively on assistance. Kenya is the country most open to trade unions in that the ›yes‹ and ›no‹ camps have equal weight.

The question on ›affiliation‹ produces slightly more defensive responses. On average, 59.5 per cent speak against af-

Figure 12  
Four countries – views of group members on support from trade unions and affiliation



Question: ›We want to know your views about possible cooperation between your group and trade unions: A. Do you believe that your group should ask trade unions for support? B. Do you think that your group should become an affiliate of an umbrella trade union?‹

Country	N (A)	Mean (A)	N (B)	Mean (B)	Country	N (A)	Mean (A)	N (B)	Mean (B)
Senegal	252	2.38	250	2.27	Kenya	137	2.97	135	2.87
Zambia	122	2.72	116	2.52	Benin	195	2.70	195	2.58

Range of values: Min=1; Max=5

filiation, while 32.8 per cent find it desirable. Kenya again is more in favour of joining hands with unions (40 per cent).

In sum, a majority of group members do not want any cooperation with trade unions. Neither do they want to affiliate or ask for support; a significant group of around a third, however, wants to approach unions and are ready to ask for both support and affiliation.

To put these findings into perspective, two points have to be considered. A rate of 32.8 per cent in favour of affiliation does not mean that 32.8 per cent of groups are ready to join unions. Our opinion poll counts the number of members, not of groups. If the overall spread of votes were the same in all groups, it would imply that all groups have a majority of members speaking against affiliation. And even in groups where a majority supported the idea of affiliation, the leaders could still have different views and, being in charge of decision-making, object to it.

The proportion of around a third of group members who favour affiliation with trade unions is rather high, compared with the proportion of those with personal experience with trade unions (see Figure 13). Most of those who opt for affiliation do not have personal experiences with trade unions. Quite clearly, the positive stance towards affiliating with trade unions is not based on personal experience, but guided by other considerations.

## EXCURSUS: PLURALITY OF MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

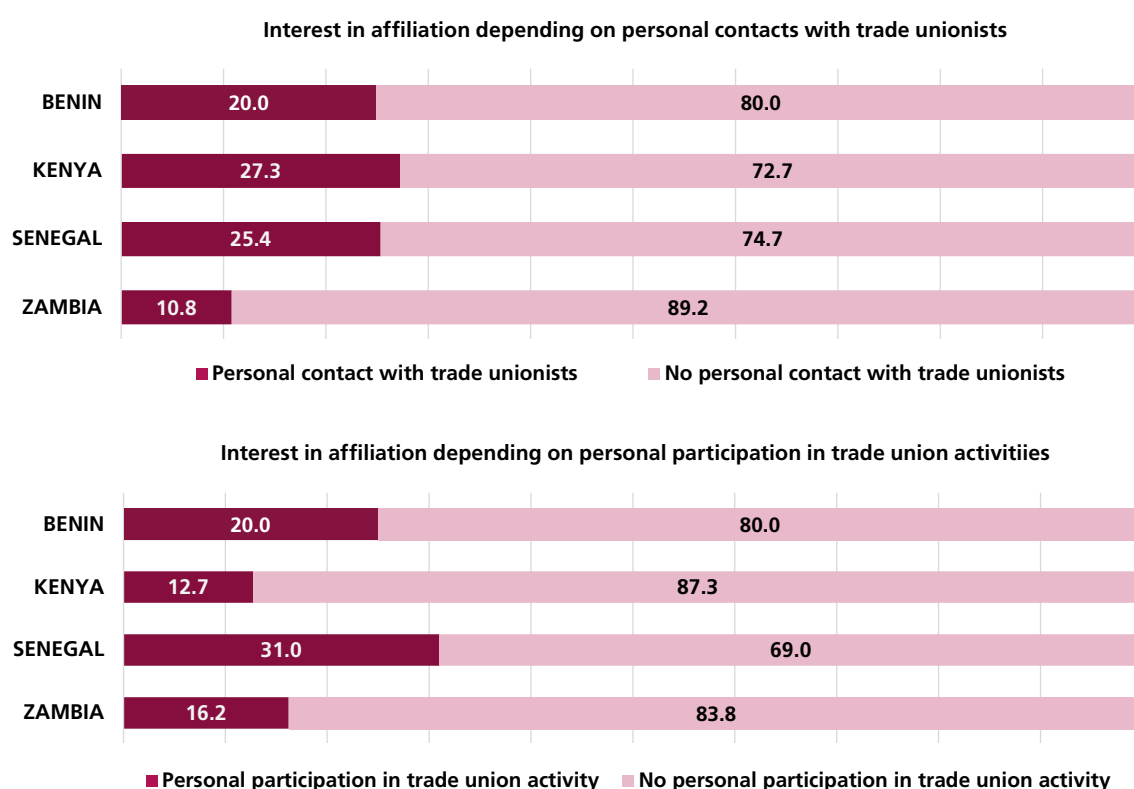
The reasons for which groups are set up may be cultural, social, business or spiritual, among others. And it can be assumed that when people join a group, they do so in accordance with the purpose for which it was set up. What spectrum of membership organizations do we find within the informal labour force? And do members of various organizations have different dispositions towards trade unions? Are members of cultural clubs or residence associations less inclined to ask trade unions for cooperation than people in, say, cooperatives and professional organizations?

Figure 14 summarizes our findings on the spectrum of membership organizations. In the four countries, the groups with the largest number of members are savings clubs (35.8 per cent), followed by religious associations (26.6 per cent) and cooperatives/credit unions (14.0 per cent).<sup>23</sup> All other organizations, such as neighbourhood associations, political parties and cultural groups, account for less than 10 per cent.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Credit unions are set up mainly as cooperatives and thus are grouped together with farm cooperatives.

<sup>24</sup> Neighbourhood/residence associations were included in Senegal and Zambia and not in Benin and Kenya; sports associations were included in Benin and Kenya and not in Senegal and Zambia. Due to this switch, the total does not sum to 100 per cent.

Figure 13  
Four countries – interest in affiliation based on personal experience with trade unions (figures in %)



Trade unions play a marginal role and are selected by only 0.5 per cent. The relevance of the various organizations varies according to countries, but the analysis of this is the subject of a different paper.

Due to the size of our sample and the low number of those who have a basic knowledge of trade unions and articulate an interest in cooperation, for statistical reasons we will use only the first three groups in the graph for further analysis, which represents a membership of 10 per cent or more.

### INTEREST IN AFFILIATION BY TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION

An interest in affiliating with trade unions varies according to the type of membership organization (see Figure 15). Members of cooperatives and credit unions have an inclination twice as high (49.6 per cent) to opt for affiliation than those who are members of religious groups (24.9 per cent). Members of savings club have an interest level somewhere in-between (33.9 per cent).

The findings confirm the supposition that members assess the functional proximity or distance of their own group to what trade unions are doing. If they see a high degree of commonality, they opt for affiliation; if they see a low common denominator, they opt against. Credit unions, and

more so, cooperatives can thus be grouped as having more conformity of purpose with trade unions than religious associations. Functional proximity, so the hypothesis goes, enhances the interest in cooperation, while large disparities in goals cool interest.<sup>25</sup>

What remains remarkable, however, is the fact that even though a clear majority of members of religious groups deny any interest, every fourth member still calls for affiliation with trade unions. This segment of members is not guided by considerations of functional conformity but must have other reasons for their interest in trade unions. Confessional trade unionism is not a key feature in the survey countries and so the interest of this significant minority in affiliating may not be based on the motive of capturing secular-oriented unions and transforming them into affiliates of religious associations. The reason may be more a general expectation that trade unions may help to improve an individual's social situation and less the prospect that affiliation would allow better performance of religious duties. We will come back to this point in the next section.

<sup>25</sup> While such an explanation may be valid in general, its application depends on the type of societies within which trade unions operate. Where trade unions are allowed to operate as confessional bodies, the functional distance from religious groups narrows or vanishes; and socialist countries have an inclination to supplement trade union activities with cultural and sports duties.

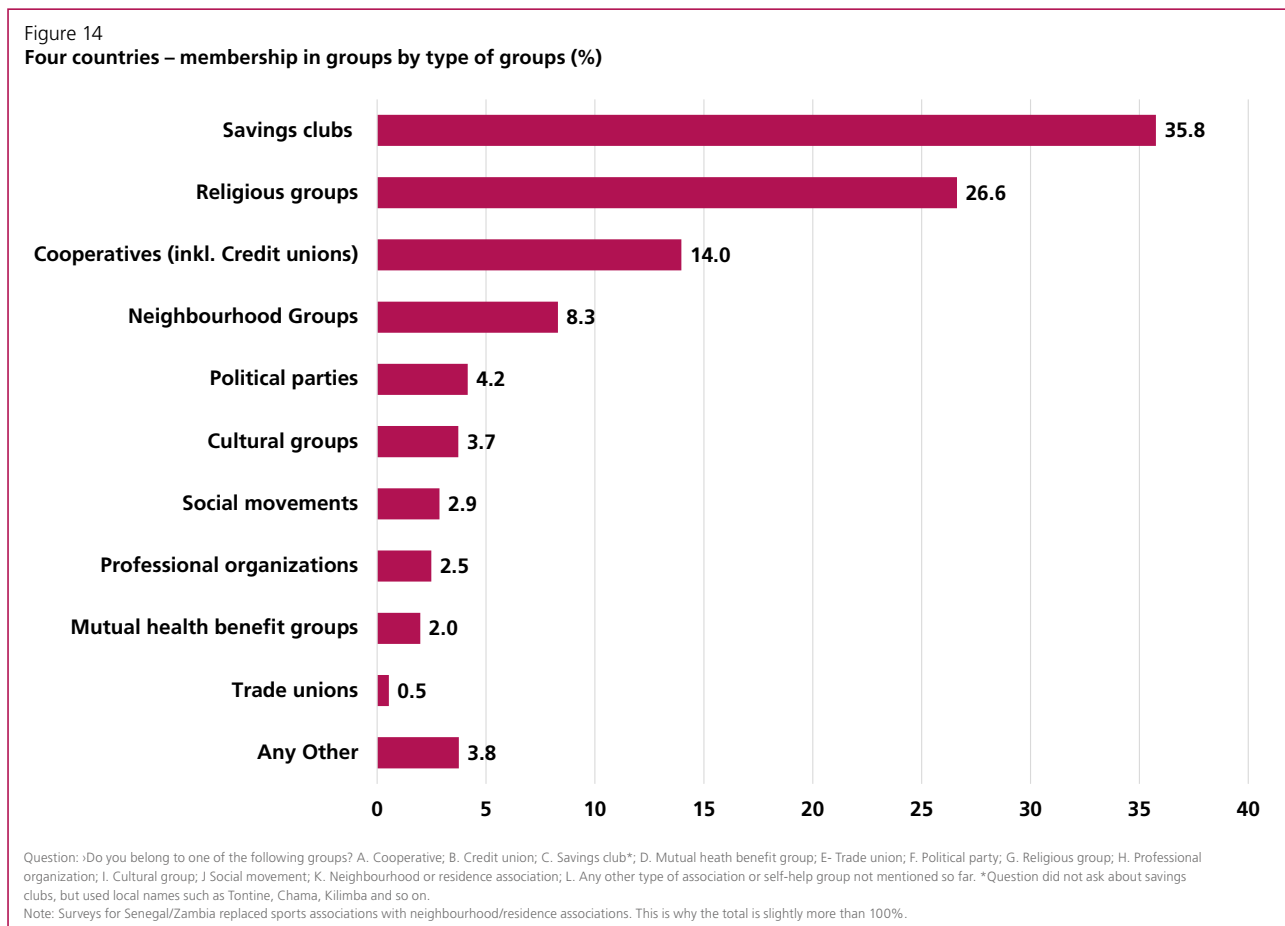
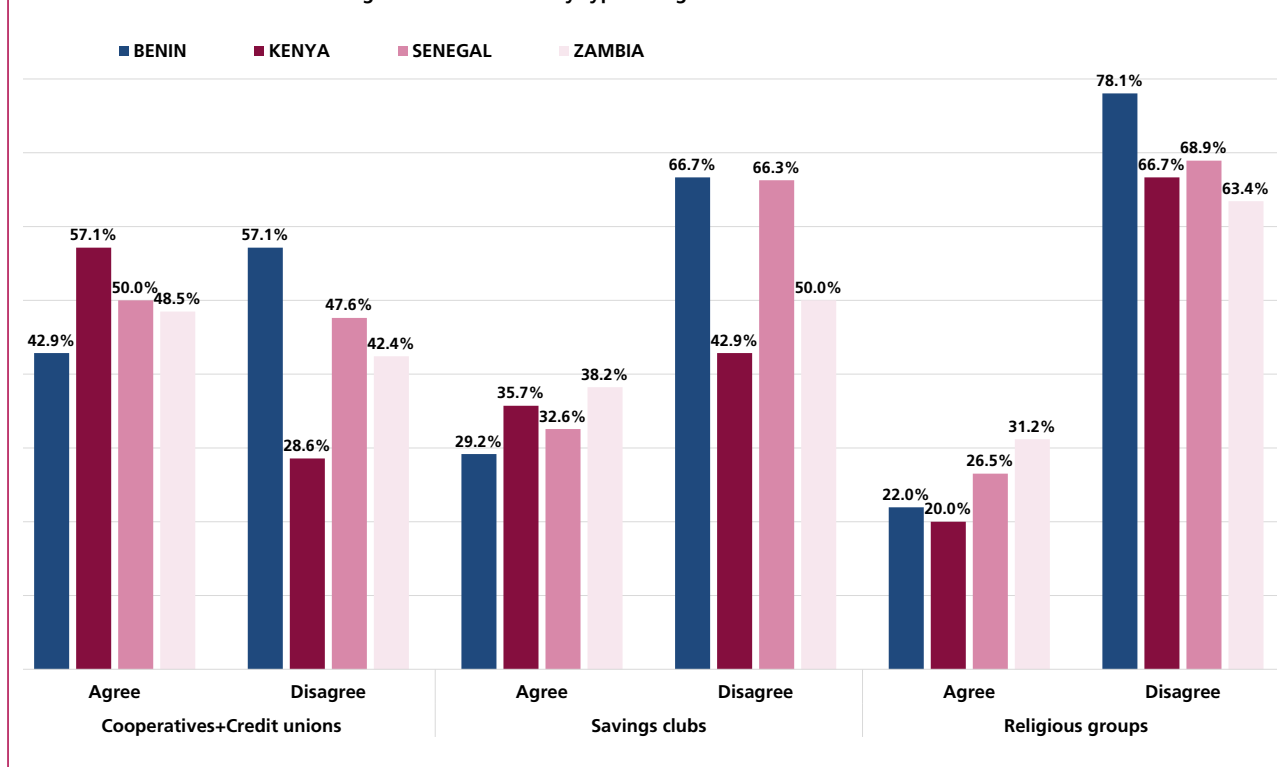


Figure 15  
Four countries – interest in affiliating with trade unions by type of organization



## DEMAND FOR SERVICES

Cooperation or affiliation is usually for a purpose. Applicants may look for support to overcome their own weakness; they may want to improve services for their own members; they may need backing to achieve certain goals; or have other reasons. Trade unions in reaching out to the informal labour force may have to decide what to put on the table. Such offers could be built on ›easy deliverables‹, which are services already available and need only to be extended to others; or they could involve new forms of assistance hitherto not available. In the latter case, trade unions may be confronted with a ›vacuum‹: expertise may not be immediately available, and a major re-profiling of duties may become necessary.

Our survey does not investigate trade union responses to the expectations of potential affiliates. Trade unions have to make up their mind concerning what they want to offer. They have to know whether they are able to mobilize sufficient resources and services to satisfy applicants' expectations. And they have to know whether their own members are in agreement with reaching out to new organizations in particular, if such solidarity implies the redirection of available resources.

Our survey is concerned with the demand side in this equation, the expectations of members of potential affiliates. We presented respondents with a list of 12 different services and asked them to give us their views on each of them. These services range from financial support to a secretariat, via legal advice and professional training, to collective bargaining and participation in social dialogue.

In selecting these services, we did not take sides on whether they can ›reasonably‹ form the platform for a discussion between the two sides. We did not consider whether they are grounded in ›realism‹, or reflect conclusions from internal group discussions. We listed a wide range of possible services in order to capture as much as possible the spectrum of hopes of individual members and their expectations towards trade unions.

The various services are grouped into five opinion clusters, in accordance with the degree to which they receive affirmation or denial. The five clusters are: dominant consent; majority consent; split opinion; majority denial; dominant denial.<sup>26</sup>

A preliminary look at the ›wish list‹ reveals huge differences between the countries (see Figure 16). Kenyans and Zambians are not very choosy, but while Kenyans with strong enthusiasm expect to receive from trade unions nearly all the services on our list, Zambians are at the opposite extreme and strongly object to nearly all, leaving only a few on which they express different views. The Beninese and Senegalese are more fastidious in how they pick some services, while disapproving of others.

<sup>26</sup> The clusters are built as follows: (1) Regroup five answer options (fully disagree; mostly disagree; partly agree/partly disagree; mostly agree/fully agree) into two (agree vs. disagree) and ignore the middle (partly agree/partly disagree) which is hardly selected anyway (always below 15%; mostly below 10%). (2) Build five opinion clusters as follows: Dominant approval: agree – disagree = 20%; Majority approval: agree-disagree = 10%–20%; Split opinion: agree-disagree = +/-10%; majority rejection: agree-disagree = -10%–-20%; dominant rejection: agree-disagree = -20%.

Figure 16  
**Four countries – request for services from trade unions by type of service**  
 Index (%): agree (fully+mostly) – disagree (fully+mostly)



A more detailed look provides the following results:

- ›Help us that government listens to our problems‹ and ›help us to get our own seat in the social dialogue with government‹ receive a positive vote in all countries. In Kenya and Benin, they reach dominant consent; in Senegal a majority; in Zambia, however, opinion is split.
- ›Help us to improve our working conditions‹ and ›help us in collective bargaining with local authorities‹ receives, on average, a positive assessment. In Kenya and Benin, this becomes a dominant view; in Senegal and Zambia it receives a split vote.
- ›Advice/counseling in legal matters, including representation in court‹ and ›help us to formalize our ac-

tivities‹. On this the range of opinion broadens. Legal counsel is a dominant expectation in Kenya and a majority view in Senegal. In Benin, it receives a split vote and in Zambia a majority rejection. Similarly spread are views on whether trade unions should help to formalize group affairs. Support is dominant in Benin and backed by a majority in Kenya and Senegal. In Zambia, respondents are split.

- ›Help us to get a health insurance scheme for our members‹: the average hovers in the positive, but between the countries, views are widely spread. A health insurance scheme is a dominant call in Kenya, and a majority demand in Senegal. Respondents in Benin are split, while in Zambia, a majority reject a health insurance scheme as the platform for cooperation with trade unions.

- ›Professional training for our members‹ produces divergent opinions. Kenya has a dominant expectation, while Benin and Senegal are split in their views. In Zambia, a majority reject this as a trade union service for affiliates.
- ›Support us in organizing a demonstration‹: this question sets the countries apart. In Senegal and Benin, a majority see this as an important duty; in Kenya and Zambia, a majority reject it.
- ›Financial support for our secretariat‹ and ›financial support for our activities‹: on average, the vote is negative. In three countries (Benin, Senegal, Zambia) a majority opt against financial support from trade unions; in Kenya, a majority would welcome union money to finance their secretariat.
- ›Help us in recruiting more members for our organization‹: a united front in all countries stands against the involvement of trade unions in recruiting members. In Kenya, a majority line up against it; in Benin, Senegal and Zambia, rejection is the dominant position.

## DEMAND FOR SERVICES BY TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION

The services on the list that respondents assessed as preferable or undesirable differ in character. Some are ›collective by nature‹ and consumable only by an organization. Others are ›personal by nature‹ in that respondents can assess the relevance of a service from the viewpoint of personal advantages. A vote in favour of a collective service is a statement of a group interest, while a vote for a service that can be consumed individually may reflect personal preference rather than a group's needs.

To obtain a better understanding of the extent to which a vote is based on the needs of a collective or on expectations of individual advancement, we selected some key services and related them to the various types of membership organization. If members are in favour of services that do not serve the aim for which a group is set up, we can assume that individual aspirations are predominant. If members are in favour of services that strengthen the group's functional purpose, the collective aspiration is dominant.

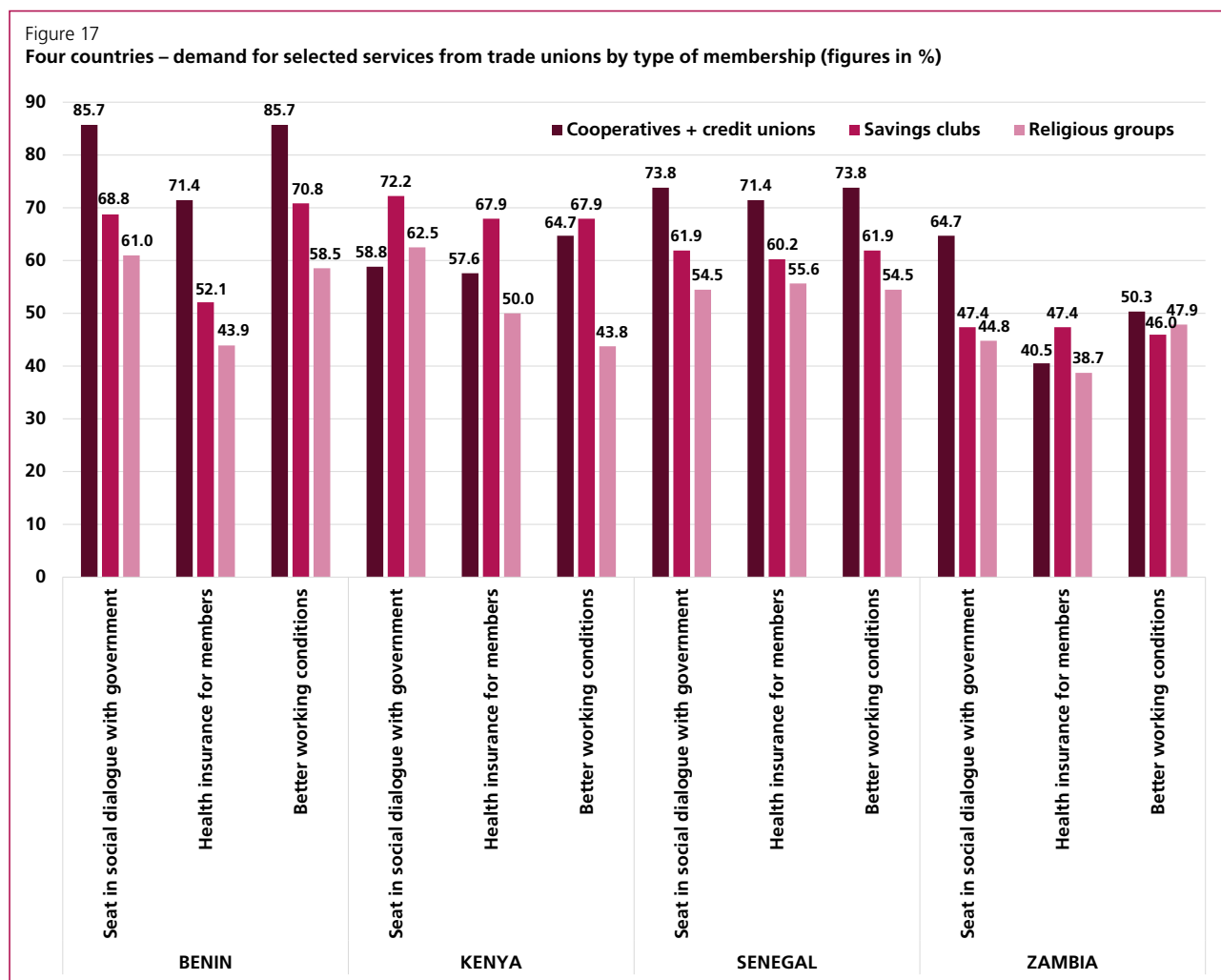
From the list of services, we select three for a deeper analysis:

- ›Getting a seat in the social dialogue with government‹: A service that is ›collective by nature‹ in that it can exist only as an organizational entitlement. It belongs to the functional portfolio of a group and cannot be assigned to an individual.
- ›Help us to get a health insurance scheme for our members‹: A service that is ›individual by nature‹ in that it targets members' personal situation. The service can be bound to group membership and may lead to the loss of coverage if membership lapses. However, it may not be in demand by those who are already covered by an insurance scheme, nor in countries in which health services are provided free of charge.
- ›Help us to improve our working conditions‹: A service that, again, targets members' personal situation. In most cases, however, the service cannot be provided to members, as the majority of member organizations are not concerned with regulating working conditions. The benefit of the service can thus not be linked to group membership.

The results are shown in Figure 17 and can be summarized as follows:

- Benin and Senegal show the strongest expression of an organizational bias in selecting services. In each of the three service checks, members of cooperatives show a stronger demand than members of savings clubs, who again rank ahead of members of religious associations.
- Kenya also exhibits an organizational bias, which is characterized in two ways: members of savings clubs are in all three cases ahead of others in demanding trade union services; and the gaps between the groups are smaller.
- The case of Zambia is mixed in that members of cooperatives call strongly for trade union support in social dialogue, but otherwise no pattern can be observed in the way members of different organizations make up their minds in favour of or against the three services.
- For an overall assessment, we can link voting to the level of demand. In Benin, the spread of the votes between cooperatives and religious associations is widest (between 25 per cent and 27 per cent), while in Senegal, the spread falls slightly (16 per cent to 20 per cent); it becomes more diverse in Kenya (14 per cent to 25 per cent) and is obscured in Zambia (four per cent to 20 per cent). But even in Benin, the spread is much smaller than the number of members of religious associations who are in favour of trade union support. This is the case for ›social dialogue‹, ›health insurance‹ and ›better working conditions‹. Thus, the organizational home of respondents and the purpose for which a group is set up are only minor motives as regards a desire to get closer to trade union services. The reasons of a large majority cannot be found in what membership organizations are doing but point to an extra-organizational foundation.

If people want trade unions to provide services to their group for reasons that are not related to their group duties and which do not promote the purpose for which it has been set up, they are attracted by what they see as personal benefits. This is immediately striking in the case of ›better working conditions‹. When group members demand ›better working



conditions<sup>27</sup> they can scarcely relate it to their group, if that group is not concerned with working issues. Respondents ignore the context of the question, disregard the relationship to the group and answer in hope of obtaining personal benefits. As working conditions are miserable for the majority of the informal labour force, substantial demand is evident. Respondents do not reflect on how trade unions would be able to deliver, but just long for a positive result.

›Health insurance coverage‹ is to some extent a different case. With the exception of ›mutual health associations‹, whose *raison d'être* lies in the provision of health insurance coverage, none of the membership groups has a specialised purpose in this area. Interest in health insurance is widespread,<sup>27</sup> however, and groups with a significant number of members would be in a situation to negotiate a group package with a health provider. Trade unions could certainly do that and offer health insurance for members and affiliates, but any larger group – including religious associations – could do that by themselves.

Getting ›a seat in the social dialogue with government‹ is way out of reach if a particular group does not meet the criteria for participation. In most countries, confessional groups

are excluded. If members of religious associations nevertheless call for it, their demand is unrealistic but not irrational. Social dialogue is often (wrongly) understood as an allocation mechanism for material benefits. People may believe that if their group participated in social dialogue, they may get a share in the distribution of benefits.

In looking at the motives of group members for cooperating with trade unions, we can recall a previous argument used when asking about individual perceptions on trade unions. Trade unions are seen as allocating agents for the distribution of benefits. Affiliation might entail access to privileges. Trade unions are a stepping stone for personal benefits, and the purpose for which a group exists is no obstacle.

## WILLINGNESS TO PAY MEMBERSHIP FEES

Self-financing is central to membership organizations' sustainability and independence. This is true for both grassroots organizations and umbrella bodies. Self-financing implies that the bulk of revenue is derived from membership dues. A trade union that offers services to affiliates without demanding monetary compensation in the form of affiliation dues or service payments risks draining its resources, which will lead to a rearrangement of financing other

<sup>27</sup> See our forthcoming paper on access to health care.

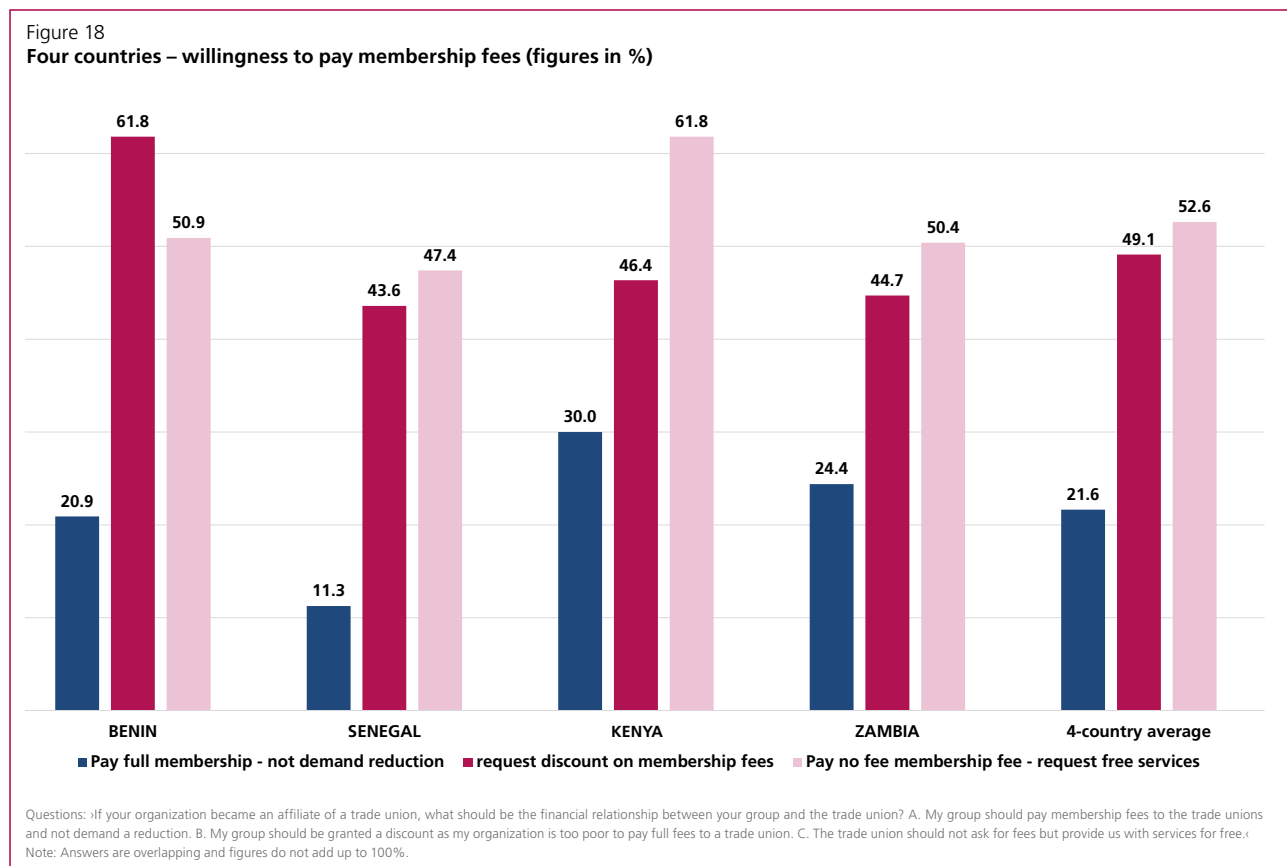
activities. Providing services for a nominal or no fee at all may be acceptable for certain reasons or as an initial incentive. But rendering services without monetary compensation may in the long run challenge the financial viability of a union and may even threaten the fulfilment of its other tasks.

How do membership organizations regard possible financial contributions if they opt for affiliation to a trade union? We raised this question in three versions, each time lowering the level of monetary contribution. First, we asked about people’s preparedness to engage in a ›standard relationship‹ by paying full dues. Then we asked about the respondent’s views on a discounted fee; and finally, we asked whether affiliation services should be provided free of charge.

Paying full membership fees is rejected by a large majority in all four countries. On average, only 21.6 per cent were of the view that their group should pay full membership once affiliated. In Kenya, the financial pressure experienced by service providers is better understood; but even here, a mere 30 per cent were in favour of full dues (see Figure 18).

Demands for a discount received wide support. On average, 49.1 per cent responded accordingly. Most of those who did not demand a discount went one step further and opted for free services. There are two large camps of similar weight, which demand either a discount or free affiliation. Only a small group was ready to pay in full for what they expect to receive.

Interest in affiliation is based mainly on the expectation that an asymmetrical relationship will evolve between service provider and receiver. The asymmetry is articulated most strongly by those who call for ›free-rider‹ status. It is also articulated by those who want a subsidy in the form of a discount. With varying intensity, respondents identify a disparity between trade unions and their own groups. Their own group is seen as too poor to pay (in full), while trade unions are perceived as ›rich‹ enough to forego monetary compensation. Services without full payment are social transfers from the stronger to the weaker, from richer to poorer.





## 5

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The survey conducted by the FES, in cooperation with the ILO and the DIE, sheds light on the views of the informal labour force on trade unions. The opinion poll is the first of its kind in that it interrogated in face-to-face interviews a countrywide representative sample of informally employed people. The aim was to find out whether segments of the informal work force are interested in cooperating with trade unions and what benefits they expect if they become members. The poll separates individual perceptions from group views on trade unions. It distinguishes what people think about trade unions in their personal capacity from how they see trade unions as members of groups, which may join trade unions as affiliates. In using the same questionnaire and the same procedure for sampling and data collection, the opinion poll allows a four-country comparison. In that way, the findings can point to country peculiarities as well as to commonalities.

In summarizing the empirical results, we find several overriding perceptions:

In general, members of the informal labour force have a low level of awareness of trade unions. In all four countries, a clear majority have never heard of trade unions or have no knowledge of what they do or stand for. There is a residential disparity, with urban dwellers being more familiar with trade union affairs. But despite their proximity to urban-oriented union activities, even large segments of the urban informal labour force show no awareness of their existence. The low level of knowledge points to a structural distance between the informal labour force and trade unions. This is confirmed by the few who have participated in trade union activity. The low level of interconnection indicates that the informal economy has been largely neglected by trade unions.

Those segments of the informal labour force who know about trade unions, however, perceive the role unions play in their countries as fairly positive. In all four countries, large majorities emphasize the importance of trade unions, believe that they help to improve the social situation for many people, and want trade unions to be strong and grow even stronger. In different intensities, however, the views expressed point to a need for trade unions to improve their performance, become more efficient and be transparent in their activities to avoid accusations of corruption. Trade un-

ionism as a principle is fully endorsed, while practical implementation may not be supported to the same extent.

There are divergences and similarities between the countries with regard to the understanding of whose interests trade unions take care. In all four countries, a majority regard trade unions as organizations for the benefit of groups in the formal sector. »Employees of the government«, »the government« and »employers in the private sector« are equally seen as beneficiaries of trade union dealings, blurring the differences between them. Adversarial relations dissipate and what prevails in the opinion of a majority of informal labour is a world of »better living« to which government, government employees and trade unions belong.

Views differ when it comes to assessing the role of trade unions in improving the situation for »workers in the informal economy«. In Benin and Kenya, a majority of those who know about trade unions perceive them as being beneficial for informal workers, while in Senegal and Zambia a majority denies such an impact. Even then, the number of those who see a positive role of trade unions for »workers in the informal economy« is several times higher than that of those who point to personal contacts with trade unions or have participated in their activities. There is something of a leap of faith with regard to trade unions that is not related to personal experience.

The fact that some segments of the informal labour force vest high hopes in trade unions is confirmed by their interest in becoming members. Extrapolated to the whole informal work force, interest in trade union membership stands as follows: in Benin it stands at 4.2 per cent; in Kenya 7.9 per cent; in Senegal 7.7 per cent; and in Zambia 5.2 per cent. As low as these shares may look at first glance, they include many more than those with personal experience and reflect again the motive of »joining an organization« that is perceived to deliver gains to its membership.

The interest of the informal workforce in joining trade unions becomes sizeable when expressed in absolute figures and compared with current membership. In Kenya, some 1,400,000 informally employed people are willing to join a trade union. For Benin, the figure is 200,000, for Senegal 300,000, and for Zambia 300,000. Winning over »the already motivated« of the informal labour force to member-

ship could easily double current trade union membership. An information campaign concerning what trade unions stand for and a mobilizing strategy that offers opportunities to participate in activities could substantially enlarge the interested segments. Viewed from this angle, the recruitment potential is large.

Affiliating to trade unions is already prominent within the organized segments of the informal labour force. With country variation ranging from 27.4 per cent (Senegal) to 40.0 per cent (Kenya) sizeable numbers of members of self-organized groups declared their willingness to affiliate with trade unions as a group. Even though this does not count the number of groups but the number of members and thus still articulates a minority view, hopes of closer cooperation are already widespread.

With regard to the spectrum of services that trade unions could provide, the majority favour ›help us get the government to listen to our problems‹, ›help us to improve our working conditions‹, ›help us to get our own seat in the social dialogue with government‹ and ›help us in collective bargaining with local authorities‹. Mostly rejected are ›financial support for our own secretariat‹, ›financial support for our own activities‹ and ›help us in recruiting more members for our own organization‹. On other services, split views were expressed.

Trade unions are accredited with comparative advantages with regard to bargaining and participation in social dialogue. The rejection of financial support for ›our own secretariat‹ and ›our own activities‹ emphasize at the same time the understanding that affiliation should not mean interference in internal affairs and should not be equated with an end to organizational autonomy. The original purpose for which a group was established should endure and activities should not end with affiliation.

Leading groups in the informal workforce in terms of membership are savings clubs, religious associations and cooperatives (including credit unions). Groups that organize around employment issues, such as trade unions and professional organizations, play a minor role. While the three dominant groups are set up for different purposes and have diverse ways of operating, the views of a majority of their members on trade unions are similar. For most, differences in the objectives of their groups do not imply different views on trade unions and do not preclude them from requesting affiliation to trade unions.

Much of the motivation for cooperating with trade unions, however, is extra-organizational. For a majority, their interest in trade unions is based on personal reasons and not founded on the belief that affiliation would affect the group's activities. Based on personal motives, members of religious groups can join trade unions, as can members of political parties or residents' associations. For many group members, a collective interest cannot be identified that exists beyond a personal interest. Trade union affiliation is judged from the expectations of personal benefits, even

though it may be irrational, if considered by the objective of the group.

Trade unions are viewed as organizations with a good monetary endowment. Classified by the degree to which group members are willing to pay fees to trade unions, we found only a minority who declared a willingness to pay normal membership fees when affiliating. The overwhelming majority in all countries want either a discount or free services. The reluctance to pay full membership fees differs only marginally in the four countries.

In general, members of groups express a surprisingly high interest in affiliating to trade unions as a collective. Much of what they want to gain from membership is, however, not related to the purpose for which their own group exists, but is based on personal benefits. In groups that have a functional affinity with trade unions, such as cooperatives, discrepancies between individual and collective interests may not matter. In groups that were set up for a purpose that cannot easily be harmonized with the operations of trade unions, the contradiction has to be taken into account.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TRADE UNION RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

What are the implications of these findings for trade unions' interest in reaching out to the informal labour force and launching a recruitment campaign?

If the trade unions were to initiate a membership campaign they would not be entering terrain in which they are completely unknown. The informal labour force represents 70 to 90 per cent of the whole labour market and four to seven per cent of it already show interest in membership. In absolute numbers this may outstrip the current membership figures, mainly involving formal labour.

The potential reaches far beyond. Even though large segments of the informal labour force do not know about trade unions and have not yet declared an interest in membership that does not mean that they cannot be organized. Trade unions can easily enlarge their base if they design an information campaign on what they stand for and come up with an organizing strategy that includes a variety of possible interventions to address the core interests of target groups. There is no doubt that informal labour may become a platform enabling the unions to double, treble or even further multiply their membership. If successfully implemented, such a campaign would certainly strengthen the trade unions' voice and make them more influential socio-politically.

In what ways can our poll findings contribute to trade union reflections on organizing segments of informal workers? This largely depends on the direction unions want to embark on in order to gain new members. Basically, there appears to be a matrix of four different approaches. On one hand, unions have to decide whether they want the membership of individuals or of groups. On the other hand, they

have to choose whether new members could come from all branches of the labour market (open recruitment) or whether certain niches or branches should be prioritized (strategic recruitment).

In the case of open recruitment, some of our findings to be considered, include:

- Additional membership should not be equated with substantially higher income from fees. Unions may encounter considerable resistance in collecting fees from individuals or groups. Unions should be prepared to subsidize membership from the informal labour force at least for an initial period.
- Many individuals interested in unions may pin their hopes on finding employment opportunities in the formal economy. They may see application for membership as a springboard to enter the privileged world of formal employment relations. Most unions, however, may find it difficult to develop themselves into job placement agencies.
- Individuals may want to join unions for material benefits, but bargaining for better conditions may become difficult, if not impossible, if members are thinly spread throughout the economy. To avoid dissipation or exhaustion of trade union energies, targeting larger groups may be advantageous.
- If trade unions opt for group membership, they may want groups to dissolve after affiliation and acquaint members with their own practices. Many initiatives for the self-organization of the informal labour force, however, produce fairly stable structures with high satisfaction rates and little preparedness to see their own groups dissolved. In many cases, trade unions will not be able to substitute the functionality of new affiliates with their own dealings. Instead, they have to provide services as add-ons and accept that affiliates will maintain their own organizational life.
- Groups whose objectives are far from the operations of trade unions may have unrealistic, if not irrational expectations concerning possible gains from membership. It would be difficult to come up with a common platform on which an umbrella union and a new affiliate could join hands for concerted action.

If unions opt for open recruitment, they may be confronted with high and overoptimistic expectations. This is less of a risk if strategic recruitment is chosen and unions decide beforehand what sectors to focus on and what type of organizations to consider. Under such circumstances, group affiliation could be the result of a negotiated deal, which would make it possible to adjust expectations concerning gains and costs to a realistic level and build a common platform based on the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. Organizational synergies would become the overriding motivation.

The same may be the case if not groups but non-organized individuals were the target of recruitment strategies. Here again, trade unions may select economic sectors and focus on branches in which they are already present. Resources that are in short supply, such as sending activists to locations with a high number of workplaces, can be used more economically. Limiting recruitment targets to fewer locations with more workplaces may make it possible to come up with a unified set of demands to smooth the way for collective bargaining.

Our survey is built on a representative sample of the whole informal labour force and not designed to highlight problems for trade unions that opt for a strategic recruitment approach in labour market branches and niches in which they already have an organizational presence and where an organizational synergy between trade unions and informal sector associations may be easier to achieve. A survey that aims to produce more insight into how to design a strategic recruitment approach should set specific priorities for a sample design: (i) focus on economic sectors in which organizing activities are already under way on the part of both trade unions and informal sector organizations; (ii) attend to the views not only of members but of the leadership and activists in informal sector organizations; and (iii) ask questions that make it possible to differentiate between various forms of cooperation, including temporary alliance-building. In doing so, a survey will not be representative of the whole informal labour force but target a controlled collective with a good knowledge of organizing strategies and in charge of group affairs. Such a sample may not be based on random selection but on information provided by trade unions and aligned to their interests. Trade unions should use empirical research methods to obtain a clearer understanding of the pros and cons of various recruitment strategies.

## OUTLOOK

This paper on the views on trade unions of people in informal employment is part of a wider survey which looks in more detail into informal social security. These aspects will be dealt with in papers yet to be published. The survey project is continuing and will include more countries. Once more data are available, this paper on views about trade unions will be supplemented to include findings from more countries.

# APPENDIX I: TECHNICAL NOTES

## PROJECT TEAM

The survey project is realized as a joint project between the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) as lead institution, and the International Labour Office (ILO) and the German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik – DIE) as cooperating partners. National survey institutes (NSI) that are part of the AfroBarometer network are the implementing partners in the survey countries. Additional technical support, including data management, is provided by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi.

Members of these institutions met on various occasions to jointly develop the questionnaire and to agree on details of the survey protocol.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY

The main objectives of the survey are to get a better understanding of the social situation of the informally employed with regard to health issues, views on trust in state and government, self-organization and interest in trade unions.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT

The ILO provides a definition of informal employment for three categories of workers:

- (i) »Employees are considered to have informal jobs if their employment relationship is, in law or in practice, not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits (advance notice of dismissal, severance pay, paid annual or sick leave, etc.).«
- (ii) »Employers and own-account workers are considered to be in informal employment when their economic units belong to the informal sector. The informal sector is a subset of household enterprises (not constituted as separate legal entities, independent of their owners) that produce goods or services for sale in the market, and that do not have a complete set of accounts and/or are not registered under national legislations.«

- (iii) »Contributing family workers are, by definition, informally employed, regardless of whether they work in formal or informal sector enterprises.«<sup>28</sup>

The definition of informal employment rests on the definition of employment. The definition of employment was changed in 2013 with the adoption of the 19th ICLS resolution I. Employment became more closely linked to remuneration and own-use production of goods was excluded from employment and recognized as one of five forms of work. Our survey is aligned to these changes, and own-use production of goods including subsistence workers is therefore excluded from informal employment.

To identify informal labour and its various categories, the survey used the following operational definitions:

*Informal farming, raising animals or fishing:* economic activities whose products are intended only or mainly for sale. If they are intended only or mainly for family consumption, activities are listed as subsistence production and excluded from the survey.

*Informal employees:* paid job with reference to an employer's contribution to a public or private pension scheme. Reference is to a main job. If employers did not pay contributions, employees were grouped as informal.

*Informal employers and own-account workers:* informality is defined by non-registration in the national registry, which is used for company taxation.

*Contributing family workers:* defined, by default, as having an informal job due to the informal nature of jobs held by contributing family workers.

*In the case of multiple jobs:* the main job is defined as the job in which the respondent usually work the highest number of hours for pay or profit. Only the main job was considered for identifying informal jobs and secondary jobs were not considered.

<sup>28</sup> ILO, Interactions between workers' organizations and workers in the informal economy: a compendium of practice (2019: 15).

## THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire originally consisted of 143 main questions, which can be broken down into several sections. The key groups are:

*Personal and sociographic data*, such as age, sex, status within the household, education, respondents' employment situation and income, household assets.

*Health issues*: respondents' experience with health services; respondents' resources in financing medical treatment; health insurance, including reasons for joining/not joining.

*Trust in state/government*: respondents' expectations with regard to services provided by the state; respondents' views on the state's capacity and willingness to provide services; respondents' views on paying taxes and fees in exchange for services; respondents' views on social inequality, social justice and the role of social policy.

*Self-organization and interest representation*: where, why and how do respondents organize themselves in groups? Do respondents feel that their interests are represented by their group? What are the respondents' views on trade unions?

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, some questions were added on how people have been responding and on government lockdown policies.

## SAMPLE DESIGN AND SAMPLING PROCESS

The sample is designed as a representative cross-section of all informally employed citizens aged 15 or above in a given country. Every citizen who corresponds to the criteria of age and informal employment is selected randomly for interview. The selected sample is achieved by random selection methods at every stage of sampling and the application of probability sampling based on population size.

The sampling process is based on stratification of the country into regions. Regions are further classified as urban or rural. Primary sampling units (PSU) – sometimes referred to as enumeration areas (EAs) – are the smallest geographical unit for which reliable population data is obtainable. The primary sampling units are selected from each stratum based on its share of the national population, and further allocated based on the urban/rural divide of each stratum. A total of eight households were clustered in each enumeration area for logistical efficiency and to lower the cost of contacting the sample. The national sample of 1,200 households is large enough to make inferences about all informally employed persons who are 15 years of age or above with an average margin of sampling error of no more than plus or minus 2.8 per cent at a 95 per cent confidence level.

The sampling process is structured in four stages: (i) selection of enumeration areas; (ii) selection of sampling start

points; (iii) selection of households; and (iv) selection of random respondents for interview. This sampling method is applied across all survey countries as a standard design. The survey uses a standard questionnaire that contains identical or functionally equivalent questions. Because of this standardization, responses can be compared across countries and over time.

- Selecting enumeration areas (EA)

Based on the latest and updated population census the national statistical offices randomly select enumeration areas for each stratum and respective rural/urban divide, based on probability proportional to size of population. For a sample of N=1,200 the statistical office randomly selects 150 enumeration areas for a given country survey – that is,  $150 \times 8 = 1,200$  interviews.

- Selecting the sampling start-points (SSPs) for each enumeration area

Across the survey countries, no complete lists of households were available from which the sample could be randomly drawn. The next best method therefore is to use physical maps (provided by the office of statistics). A sampling start-point (SSP)<sup>29</sup> is marked on the map and field teams travel as close as possible to it, or to housing settlements nearest to it. A second SSP is selected as a reserve or substitute in case the initial SSP is inappropriate or inaccessible.

- Selecting the household – walking pattern of interview teams

The interviewers start walking away from the physical start-point, with interviewer 1 walking towards the sun; interviewer 2 in the opposite direction; interviewers 3 and 4 at a 90-degree angle to the right and left. With this walking pattern, all four directions are covered. By counting households on both sides of the walking path, household No. 5 is selected as the first household for the interview and household No. 15 for the second interview.<sup>30</sup>

If the interview cannot take place because nobody is at home or the interview starts but cannot be finished the walk continues to the next household on the same side of the road or opposite (household No. 6), while the second interview is done in household No. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Random selection of a start-point uses a grid. A ruler is placed along the top of the map and another along the side. A table of random numbers is then used to select pairs of numbers, one for the top axis and one for the side axis, resulting in a random combination. A line is then drawn on the map horizontal to the number chosen on the side, and another line is drawn vertical to the number chosen on the top. The point on the map where these two lines intersect is the sampling start-point. Each X-Y pair of numbers from the random number table can be used only once.

<sup>30</sup> Special rules were applied in the case of multi-storey buildings, widely scattered households and settlements within commercial farms.

If the interview is refused the walk continues in the same direction until household No. 15. The second interview would take place with household No. 25.

- Identifying informally employed respondents for the interview

At the household level, each interview is done in two phases. Phase 1 of the interview is conducted with the household head or the most knowledgeable person living in the household. The most knowledgeable person is the one who is best informed about all the other members of the household. The household head (or most knowledgeable person) provides information on each member of the household (15 or older), based on which a list is drawn up to include all members who meet the criteria for informal employment. The respondent for the main part of the interview (phase 2) is randomly selected from the list of informally employed persons for interview. If the selected respondent is unavailable the fieldworker makes an appointment for a later time in the day for a second attempt. If the interview is unsuccessful after the second attempt, the fieldworker randomly selects another respondent who qualifies for informality within the same household for the interview. If the second respondent is unavailable or the interview is unsuccessful for whatever reason, the household is dropped and the fieldworker replaces it with another household.

## IMPLEMENTING THE SURVEY

### NATIONAL SURVEY INSTITUTES (NSI)

National survey institutes (NSI) that are part of the AfroBarometer network and have long-standing experience in opinion polling are contracted to implement the survey. They follow the protocol for survey implementation laid down in a manual. National survey institutes are responsible for indigenising the questionnaire, translating it into local languages, programming the tablets, selecting and training the enumerators, conducting field protests, drawing up the field plan, organizing and supervising the interviews, controlling data quality and, finally, presenting the results for further use. The work of national survey institutes is guided by an external supervisor whose duty is to ensure uniform application of research rules.

### TRANSLATION INTO LOCAL LANGUAGES

The survey uses English and French as primary survey questionnaire languages. They are in turn translated into the most widely spoken local languages in the countries. All respondents have the choice of language in which they prefer to be asked questions and provide responses in a language in which they feel at home conversing.

## TRAINING OF INTERVIEWERS AND PRE-TESTING

Training of field teams in preparation for the survey lasts five to seven days, during which the questionnaire is reviewed comprehensively and teams practice using the tablets. The training includes pre-testing and final refinement of the questionnaire. The fieldworkers' practice interviews serve as pre-tests of all of the local-language versions of the questionnaire. All members of the teams, including the supervisors, administer at least two questionnaires during the practice/pre-test phase. In a feedback session, the experiences during pre-testing are discussed and scope is provided to amend the questionnaire.

## INTERVIEW TEAMS

Interview teams going into the field are made up of four interviewers/enumerators and one supervisor. The supervisor is the person to whom all interviewers report every day and address emerging problems. Field supervisors usually have at least an undergraduate degree, as well as experience in collecting data and managing teams of fieldworkers. Fieldworkers have some university education, a strong facility in local languages and an ability to relate to respondents in a respectful manner.

The field team structure is fitted to the size of the sample (1,200 interviews). Interviewers try to complete four interviews per day or 16 per field team; each field team tries to cover two enumeration areas per day. At this rate, it takes eight field teams (32 interviewers x 4 interviews/day = 128 interviews/day) 9.37 days or one-and-a-half weeks, including rest and travel days, to complete a standard survey. This is feasible because each team has a hired vehicle dedicated to it during fieldwork. Field teams are covered by insurance during the period of fieldwork.

## ELECTRONIC DATA CAPTURE

Data collection is done through computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), using tablets. The tablets are provided with the software Survey-To-Go (STG) and loaded with the questionnaire. The interviewers read questions from the screen of handheld tablets to respondents. The programming of the tablets filters the questionnaire and the random selection of the informally employed member of the household for the second phase. Interviewers used the tablets page-by-page and found instructions on what to do each time. Coding of responses is done with a touch of the screen.

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# THE INTEREST OF INFORMAL LABOUR IN TRADE UNIONS

Findings from representative country surveys in Sub-Saharan Africa



Labour markets in many Sub-Saharan African countries are faced with a switch from formal to informal employment and today, informal employment provides income to 80 to 90 per cent of workers. For trade unions, the shrinking of workplaces in the formal economy translates into an organizational crisis as their traditional base for recruiting is under threat. Trade unions are now engaged in debates if the informal labour force should be the new recruitment terrain and which strategies to apply. Despite some cases with impressive numerical gains in recruiting informal economy workers into its fold it is not yet clear where the journey will lead to. Many unions and national centres remain reluctant and those who affiliate informal workers' associations do not (yet) provide membership with full voice.



While the organizational debate is on, empirical research on the views and expectations of those who operate under informal employment is largely missing. What do the informally employed think about trade unions? Do they want to be organized by them? What kind of services do they request? Would they be willing to pay membership fees or hope for discounted tickets? And what if the informally employed are already self-organized and have their own forms of interest amalgamation? Would they be interested to join trade unions as individual members or do they prefer to affiliate as a group? And how would a group affiliation impact on the type of services trade unions should provide?



The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in cooperation with the International Labour Office (ILO) and the German Development Institute (DIE-GDI) recently initiated an empirical research project on *Informal Employment, Social Protection and Political Trust* in Sub-Saharan Africa which includes an *opinion poll* on »views on trade unions«. The survey sheds light on the willingness of the informally employed to cooperate with trade unions or even join them as members or affiliates. The opinion polls are conducted as country-wide representative surveys with a uniform research protocol to allow cross-border comparison. The report presented here summarizes the findings from the surveys in Kenya (2018), Benin (2018), Senegal (2019) and Zambia (2019).

Further information on the topic can be found here:

[www.fes.de/en/africa-department](http://www.fes.de/en/africa-department)