

THE UNDERBELLY OF TRADE UNIONISM IN AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS

*Christiana O. Kappo-Abidemi**, *Charles O.K. Allen-Ile***, *Chux Gervase Iwu****

Abstract

Since the evolution of organised labour, workers the world-over have depended upon and trusted their trade union federations to defend and advance their social, political and economic interests. These and other worker-related issues have been the focus of successful trade unionism before the emergence of globalization, privatization, outsourcing, contracting and labour-related phenomena associated with diminishing power of organised labour. These factors have been used as indices to determine the growth and effectiveness of trade union federations globally. This article, however, examines ways by which selected trade union federations in Africa have been able to tackle factors militating against their effectiveness. The article draws on perspectives from two biggest federations in Africa- Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). These two countries are often referred to as 'African powerhouses'. COSATU is by far, the largest of the three union federations in South Africa. The NLC on the other hand, is the only recognized trade union federation in Nigeria. The aim of this paper is to shed 'new' light on the performance of trade union federations in Africa by comparatively analysing how they are perceived by their general membership in relation to their effectiveness in securing or promoting governance and the resultant effect on their members and non-members alike are examined and compared with respect to their effectiveness in both countries. The paper is based on research that utilised quantitative and primary data collected through survey questionnaires administered to members of selected trade unions that are affiliated to these two trade union federations. Results emerging from empirical analyses indicate that COSATU and NLC activities go far beyond traditional workers representation.

Keywords: Industrial, Labour, Employment Relations, Trade Unions, Trade Union Federation, Strike, Collective Bargaining, Worker Representation, Participation

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**Department of People Development and Technology, Faculty of Business Management Science & Law, Walter Sisulu University, Postdam Site, East London, South Africa*

***Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa*

****Entrepreneurship & Business Management, Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa*

1 Introduction

A trade union consists of many occupational and professional affiliated bodies. It is an age-long traditional association of workers, which is meant to protect them from any form of exploitation by employers and government. They negotiate befitting wages and salaries on behalf of workers and above all, protect the interests of members (Sunmonu, 1996). The economic, political and the socio-cultural environment, in which trade unions operate affects their performance, hence whatever changes occur in society, tend to affect the output and operations of trade unions (Buhlungu, 2002). These factors have both stabilized and destabilized the existence of trade unions in the past and the present as well. In as much as environmental influences remain unstable, the affairs of the unions remain unstable as well. These

have contributed to the rise and fall of trade union activities in Africa as well as in some parts of the world.

Schillinger (2005) describes a trade union as an organised group of wage and salary earners with the purpose of bringing to bear the economic, social and political interest of their members in labour relations and the political system. A trade union is the only organisation through which workers' economic power is expressed. It is often said that the land cannot bring forth its fullness unless workers plough, sow and reap, which implies that the economic and political situation of a state cannot improve if workers fail to deliver expected services in terms of labour. Hence, the importance of workers and workers' unions cannot be over-emphasized in any country (Beckman et al, 2010; Murphy, 2006).

1.1 Background to the study

The study is an empirical comparative analysis of two African countries. One of the countries is located at the southern part of the continent while the other is situated at the western part. Both countries (South Africa and Nigeria) have, respectively, experienced apartheid and colonization, or both, that have, until recently, deprived the indigenous working populations of some bargaining rights in their relations with employers. A brief study of their respective trade union federations was undertaken.

1.2 Overview of trade union federations in South Africa and Nigeria

1.2.1 South Africa

South Africa is located at the southern tip of the African continent, (29°00'S 24°00'E) and with a land area of 1.22 million square kilometres (470,693 square kilometres). It is bordered by Swaziland and Mozambique (northeast), and Namibia (northwest), Botswana and Zimbabwe in the north. Within the south-eastern part of South Africa is the Kingdom of Lesotho, which is a small mountainous enclave (Anon 1, 201; BBC News, 2011). The Republic of South Africa is a diverse country in terms of people, language (there are eleven official languages in existence) and culture. According to the 2006 General Household Survey (GHS) conducted by Statistics South Africa, the population of the country was about 49 million and unequally divided across four major descents: Africans, Indians/Asians, Whites and Coloureds (Stats SA, 2006; Underwood, 2006).

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was founded in 1985 as a response to the discrimination and oppression experienced by black African workers during the Apartheid regime, although it has a racially-inclusive membership. COSATU is the largest and most active trade union federation in South Africa, with a registered membership of about 1.8 million of the total 3.11 million nationally-registered workers and have twenty-one (21) affiliate unions (Anon 2, 2010; Buhlungu et al, 2008; Munakamwe, 2009). Other registered trade union federations in South Africa include the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU), Federation of the Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA) and the Confederation of South Africa Workers Union (CONSAWU). However, COSATU arose from the remnants of previously established union groupings such as the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), South African Trade and Labour Council (SATLC) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) that were not allowed to progress further owing to interference by the Apartheid government and racial issues (Buhlungu et al, 2008).

Despite the diversity in the population of South Africa, the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) has been able to penetrate the private and public sectors, as well as all regions and provinces. This achievement came at a huge price as COSATU was part of the political history of South Africa; and was recognised for its contribution to the liberation of the state through protest actions and political strikes (Schillinger, 2005).

Historically, trade unionism in the early days of South Africa was exclusively for Whites; participation of Africans/Blacks in active trade unionism was not allowed. The first recognized Blacks-inclusive trade union was allowed to register and given official recognition under the Industrial Conciliation (Amendment) Act of 1979 and the Labour Relations Act of 1981 (Anon 2, 2010; Buhlungu, 2002). With official recognition granted, the union gained certain privileges such as the right to employ full-time officials who earn a monthly salary, the right to negotiate on behalf of workers and the signing of binding agreements with employers and government. These rights enabled trade union officials to become more committed to union duties, hence their participation in union activities became more of a career rather than a struggle. South Africa is a developing country, which is recovering from being deprived of participation in the global political and economic arena owing to years of isolation under Apartheid governance, which inculcated racial discrimination in all aspects of South African society, including trade unionism (Underwood, 2006).

Despite the fact that COSATU operated in a hostile environment, it remained one of the strongest and well-organized trade union federations in Africa, and one to be reckoned with in the world. In the late 1980s to the early 1990's, when more developed nations such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Holland and others were experiencing a decrease in trade union membership, South African trade union membership experienced an astronomical growth. In fact, between 1979 and 1993, there was an increase in membership from 700,000 to 2.8 million (Wood and Harcourt, 1998; Zammit and Rizzo, 2002).

COSATU was however, not merely a trade union federation, but was also part of the anti-Apartheid movement that joined the struggle for the freedom of African/Blacks. Since the end of Apartheid, COSATU has been able to extend its powerbase into the political arena with union officials now serving as members of parliament as well as representatives in the tripartite alliance. This alliance is a combination of COSATU, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) government and the South African Communist Party (SACP), which advises the ruling government on economic and social policy issues (Schillinger, 2005; Wood and Harcourt, 1998). The involvement of COSATU in the tripartite alliance, however, has led to the successful amendment of the existing Labour

Relations Act (LRA) in 1995, with consequent better service condition for workers.

Due to COSATU's proximity to the central ANC-led government, other avenues were established to settle grievances between workers and employers such as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA); the Labour Appeal Court; and the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) (Wood and Harcourt, 1998). Recently, the ruling ANC government acknowledged that through working together with its alliance partners (especially COSATU), the legislative framework, which protects and guarantees the rights of the worker was established (Zuma, 2009). Furthermore, the alliance successfully negotiated a massive roll-out of anti-retrovirals for HIV-infected workers, as well as for the general public. Subsequently, the alliance teamed up with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a lobby group, to campaign against the spiralling new HIV/AIDS infection, which was discovered to be affecting about 5.5 million South Africans, and of whom majority of the citizens could not afford treatment on their own (Anon 2, 2010).

1.2.2 Nigeria

Comparative to South Africa, Nigeria is the most densely populated country in Africa, with a population of about 150 million (Census, 2006). It is located in the western region of the African continent, and occupies a land area equivalent to the combined size of France, Germany and Belgium. The country is bordered by Cameroon to the east and south east, Republic of Benin to the west, Chad in the north east and Niger to the north. Nigeria has three major ethnic groups namely Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Due to British colonization, the official language is English. The diversity in ethnicity, tribalism and religious grouping has always been the major reason for political turbulence in the country (Hermes, 2012). Nigeria's ethnic diversity has led to a huge differential in workplace principles and workers' performance, as shown by Ahiauzu (1985) in his study, which centred on Hausa and Igbo workplaces. Moreover, military rule, which has accounted for thirty-one (31) years out of the fifty-one (51) years of the country's independent life, has entrenched an authoritarian culture, which has affected all levels of human and organisational behaviour, including the trade unions (Odah, 2007).

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was established in 1978 to protect, defend and promote the rights, well-being and interests of all workers and pensioners in Nigeria. To date, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) comprises up to 4 million registered members across the public and private sectors. Until recently, 2009, it was the only official labour union federation in Nigeria (Tar, 2009). The NLC succeeded the previous four trade unions, namely Nigeria Trade

Union Congress (NTUC), Labour Unity Front (LUF), United Labour Congress (ULC), and Nigeria Workers Council (NWC) with over a thousand affiliates that often resulted in rivalry and resentment (Melson, 1971). These affiliates became amalgamated into forty-two national unions, which then came together as one trade union federation hence, the birth of the Nigeria Labour Congress (Odah, 2007; Tar, 2009).

The union has often resorted to strike action and general labour stoppage to disrupt different government decisions that do not favour workers and the masses such as the increase in fuel pump prices (Tar, 2009). However, like any other association, the Nigerian Labour Congress has experienced its own share of brutality from the government (especially during the various military governments). The federation was dissolved on two different occasions due to what was referred to as interference and opposition to government policies and decisions (Abu, 2007; Olukoshi and Aremu, 1988).

The Nigerian economy basically, solely depends on only the exportation of crude oil and the foreign importation of all manner of finished goods with the resultant adverse effect of unemployment, which by extension leads to a reduction in trade union membership (Offiong, 2005). This phenomenon explains one of the reasons why the country has a meagre 4 million registered workers out of a total national population of approximately 150 million. The import-driven economy of Nigeria, has led to some industries closing down and some of the existing ones underperforming, hence the resultant lay-off of workers. Unemployment, low living standards, the poor state of infrastructure, poor industrial base, political instability, collapse of public infrastructure (especially public utilities such as power and water), weakness of democratic governance, and the reappearance of ethnic chauvinism, amongst others, have been some of the sources of contention between the government and Nigerian trade union federations (Odah, 2007; Tar, 2009).

In addition, successive Nigerian governments seemed unconcerned about the condition of state facilities and its consequent effect on workers and the masses. The Nigeria Labour Congress has always stated its desire to work with political parties (as applicable in South Africa), if certain issues could be compromised. However, in spite of the fact that an alliance could not be formed with the democratic government, both parties have been able to develop an understanding on some issues leading to a reduction in the spate of arrests and molestations of union leaders as witnessed during military regimes (Alalade, 2004). Moreover, attempts by union leaders to form alliances with political parties in order for their opinions on specific issues to be heard by the government of-the-day has been largely unsuccessful, hence, the felt-need for the union to start its own political party, namely the Labour Party, which contested elective positions during the 2007 and 2011 national general elections.

One of the party's aim was to place the country's resources and wealth under the control of workers in a democratic setting (Ibrahim, 2010; Melson, 1971; Tuman, 1994).

Nevertheless, both COSATU and the NLC have been at the forefront of denouncing neo-liberal policies, which were blind to workers' rights. Both trade union federations have experienced being banned and unbanned at various times for various reasons, which include antagonising the government on policies that do not favour the working class and the general well-being of the citizens. However, in spite of all these challenges, they are still in existence after decades of establishment.

With South Africa and Nigeria having experienced better prevailing political climates in recent years, this study aimed to analyze the common features and to evaluate differences in the perceptions of both groups of workers concerning their trade union federations taking into consideration the perceived closeness of these unions to their central governments nowadays. Both trade unions share certain similarities in terms of their involvement in the struggle for democracy and the constant mediation between workers, the masses and the ruling government. Hence, with the days of struggle for freedom gone, and with involvement in trade unionism becoming a career option, this study is further interested in determining the opinion of workers regarding trade union officials. Finally, this study will serve as a framework for further research, which could be conducted concerning whether trade unionism still has relevance in modern society.

1.3 Research objectives

The general objective of this study is to determine the perception of South African and Nigerian workers concerning their trade union federations. More specifically, the study also attempts to:

- (a) Investigate similarities and differences between South Africa and Nigeria trade union members' perceptions of their trade union federations;
- (b) Examine the relationship between the trade union federations and their affiliates;
- (c) Ascertain the level of trade union involvement in political affairs and international solidarity in support of workers; and
- (d) Explore members' understanding of trade union leadership styles, administrative set up and general management of the organisation.

1.4 Research questions

Based on the overall understanding of the focus of the study, the following questions form the basis of this study:

- (a) Do trade unions actually, meaningfully influence the process of collective bargaining between employees and employers or government?

- (b) Do affiliate unions support the trade union federations in seeking international solidarity?

- (c) How often do trade unions engage their affiliates in policy making, training and development programmes?

- (d) To what extent are trade union members involved in the federations administrative set up?

- (e) Do trade union policies favour both genders?

1.5 Significance of the research

Workers in both private and public sectors comprise a huge percentage of the total national populations; hence they influence the economic condition of a country. Trade unions in both South Africa and Nigeria have shown the power of workers in the polity of these nations through the organization of mass strike actions. These strikes have been the instrument of negotiations which are used by workers against the government even before the establishment of either COSATU or the NLC. The successes of these mass actions have proven to the employers as well as the workers that if industrial action is embarked upon *en masse*, it can disrupt national affairs in its totality (NLC, 1991; South Africa Info, 2009).

Recent events seem to show that workers are no longer connected with the objectives of their trade unions or rather; trade unions have completely derailed from their commitment to the workers. Rust (2001) explains the challenges faced by South African workers and the role that trade unions were expected to play in order to attract and retain membership. These problems are not limited to Africa alone, but are indeed universal. However, it is more imperative for trade unions to give their members valid reasons to believe more in them now than ever before. Therefore, this study examines the expectations of workers and their perceptions of the performance of their union federations thus far. COSATU being the largest union federation in South Africa; and NLC, the sole, recognized union federation in Nigeria, together with their history of being part of their respective national struggles make for interesting case study.

An understanding of workers' expectations and perceptions of their trade unions can help in strengthening worker/representative relations thus possibly enlarging their contributions to the unions. A major implication of this study therefore is that it reveals the sides of trade unionism that are not normally seen. These sides are the power (leadership styles/administrative setup; conflict of power and interest among union executives) and passion (organising against repressive anti-worker policies) of trade unionism. These revelations will no doubt assist in improving an organisation's corporate relations with its employees.

2 Research methodology: sampling and research process

The study was aimed at analysing perceived common features and differences in the relationship between trade union federations and their memberships in both South Africa and Nigeria. Furthermore, trade union memberships' understanding of the workings of their federations, as well as the feelings of both sets of workers from South Africa and Nigeria were comparatively analyzed. Quantitative and primary empirical data were collected through survey questionnaires distributed to members of selected trade unions that are affiliated to the two union federations. The study investigated participants' perceptions of trade union federations' performance in South Africa and Nigeria by using an attitude scale to measure participants' position on the questionnaire statements.

2.1 Data collection

The survey approach of data collection was adopted; with participants selected from amongst members of two trade unions affiliated to COSATU (the South African Municipal Workers Union – SAMWU and the South African Democratic Teachers Union – SADTU) and NLC (the National Union of Local Government Employees – NULGE and the Nigerian Union of Teachers – NUT). These particular unions were targeted because they are among those with the highest membership numbers in both countries. The simple random sampling technique of the probability sampling method (Welman and Kruger, 2005) was employed to select the participants from the two national unions from each country. This ensured that all members of the selected trade union affiliates from both countries stood an equal chance of participating in the study. The questionnaire was designed to address various issues that are important to union members while response sets ranging from 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree', to 'strongly agree' were given. Participants were required to indicate their position on the opinion expressed by the statement in the questionnaire. The demographic aspects of the instrument helped to ascertain the level of involvement and experience of participants with the federations' union affiliates. It was also helpful for further ascertaining gender relations in the activities of trade unions and their federations. Each of the variables in the questionnaire was coded for the purpose of data analysis. The quantitative nature of the questionnaire further gave participants the opportunity to remain anonymous and to respond to questions with complete confidentiality since the answers would not be traced back to them.

2.2 Data analysis procedure

The quantitative nature of the questionnaire and the potentially large number of participants in this study meant that quantitative data analytical technique was deemed to be most appropriate. Eventually, a total of two hundred (200) useable questionnaires were retrieved from participants. Responses were coded and entered into a spreadsheet using SPSS 18 to analyze the coded data. The chi-square test was conducted to analyse the response frequencies of the relevant variables while the results are presented within the structure of the key research questions and objectives.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Demographic background of participants

In administering the questionnaires, it was ensured that at least an equal number of respondents would be submitted for both countries, namely 50.0 % of the respondents from each country, making it 25.0 % of participants from each national union affiliate profiled. The demographics of the participants in the study, as shown in Table 1, revealed that majority (56.0 %) of respondents are males, while the remaining 44.0 % are females. Furthermore, most (33.0 %) of the participants were over 41 years in age, closely followed by those within the age bracket of 31-35 years (25.0 %). Respondents within the age bracket of 21-25 years comprised a meagre 9.0 %, making them the least represented of all the age groups profiled in the study. This may mean that it takes time to secure jobs or that the membership of unions, at this stage, is ageing in both South Africa and Nigeria. Table 1 shows further statistical analysis of the demographics of respondents.

In order to further cross-reference the above observed trend and to ensure that the data was unbiased, respondents' years of work experience as well as the length of their membership of a trade union were also examined. Results showed that respondents with work experience of between 6-10 years (45.0 %) constituted the largest population in the study. However, there was no distinct disparity in the population of respondents within the other years of work experience that was surveyed in the study. It is, however, noteworthy to mention that while respondents with 6-10 years' work experience comprised the largest proportion of those surveyed, those with more than or close to 26 years of work experience constituted the lowest proportion (12.0 %) in this study. Hence, the result from this study revealed an inverse relationship between proportion of respondents and their work experience. This pattern strongly reflects earlier findings by Munakamwe (2009).

Table 1. Demographic data of respondents

Demographics	N (%)
Total sample	200 (100%)
Gender	
Male	111 (55.5%)
Female	89 (44.5%)
Total	200 (100%)
Age	
21-25 years	17 (8.5%)
26-30 years	34 (17.0%)
31-35 years	50 (25.0%)
36-40 years	33 (16.5%)
≥41 years	66 (33.0%)
Total	200 (100%)
Work experience	
6-10 years	89 (44.5%)
11-15 years	29 (14.5%)
16-20 years	30 (15.0%)
21-25 years	29 (14.5%)
≥26 years	23 (11.5%)
Total	200 (100%)
Length of trade union membership	
1-5 years	64 (32.0%)
6-10 years	44 (22.0%)
11-15 years	39 (19.5%)
16-20 years	25 (12.5%)
≥21 years	28 (14.0%)
Total	200 (100.0%)

Table 1 further showed that length of trade union membership of respondents is highest (32.0 %) among those that have been members of trade unions between 1-5 years. Those who have been members for 6-10 years (22.0 %) were second and those with 11-15 years (20.0 %) membership were a close third. Work experience is a determinant for the length of trade union membership of workers because it is not possible to belong to the union without being employed. Therefore, this explains the direct relationship between work experience and length of trade union membership of respondents.

3.2 Relationship between trade union federations and their affiliate national unions

The working relationship between trade union federations (TUF) and their affiliate national unions in various contexts was also profiled. This is aimed at exploring the relationship between trade union federations and their affiliates. The result in Table 2 shows the relationship between the union federations and their affiliates in the context of their finances.

Table 2. Financial relationship between the TUF and its affiliates

Accessibility of trade union federations annual financial statements by affiliates					Accountability and management of allocated funds from affiliates by trade union federations			
	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square
Disagree	30 (43.5 %)	50 (51.5 %)	80 (47.5 %)	0.000	25 (37.9 %)	44 (50.0 %)	69 (43.9 %)	0.002
Agree	39 (56.5 %)	47 (48.5 %)	86 (52.5 %)		41 (62.1 %)	44 (50.0 %)	84 (56.1 %)	
Total	69 (100 %)	97 (100 %)	166 (100 %)		66 (100 %)	88 (100 %)	154 (100 %)	

Table 2 shows that a majority of South African respondents (57.0 %) believed that COSATU is financially transparent, while the opposite is the case with the NLC (49.0 %). This implies that affiliate

members do not have access to the financial statements of the NLC as do those of COSATU. Furthermore, Chi-square test of association between the two countries shows a significant difference in terms of financial transparency in the financial dealings of the two trade union federations. Both federations generate their incomes from affiliate contributions (Abu, 2007; Benzuidenhout, 2000), which is why the opinions of affiliate members about the federations' accountability and access to the financial record could be taken seriously.

Also, the opinions of respondents concerning accountability and the prudent management of allocated funds, which comes directly from affiliate members to the union federations are also shown in Table 2. Majority of South African respondents (62.0 %) believed that the funds entrusted to COSATU were well-managed and can be accounted

for. However, there is no clear agreement among Nigerian respondents who are divided down the middle on this variable in the research. Chi-square analysis of association shows a significant difference between COSATU and NLC in the way that funds meant for the operations of these two federations were managed.

A key instrument in the operations of trade unions is their ability to mobilize members for industrial actions when negotiating for better working conditions for them and to voice their opinion against any government policies that they find repressive to the masses, for example, increase in petrol pump price or high rate of inflation and unemployment. Hence, this study also sought to establish how promptly trade union federations were able to mobilize affiliate members for industrial actions.

Table 3. Mobilization of affiliate members for industrial action

Trade union federations could get through to its affiliate bodies to embark on industrial action within a short period				Government only listen to trade union demands when threatened with (or when workers embark on) strike actions				
	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square
Disagree	20 (27.4 %)	12 (14.0 %)	32 (20.7 %)	0.004	31 (36.0 %)	15 (15.6 %)	23 (25.8 %)	0.001
Agree	53 (72.6 %)	74 (86.0 %)	127 (79.3 %)		55 (64.0 %)	81 (84.4 %)	136 (74.2 %)	
Total	73 (100 %)	86 (100 %)	159 (100 %)		86 (100 %)	96 (100 %)	158 (100 %)	

Table 3 shows that 73 % of affiliate members in South Africa and 86 % in Nigeria agree that their union federations could easily get through to the affiliates in order to embark on industrial action within the shortest period of time. The higher proportion returned by Nigerian respondents might be connected to the repressive anti-worker policies of the past military governments, and to some extent, governments of the recent past. Hence, the NLC uses industrial actions to bargain with the government of the day. Overall, there exists a significant difference ($p=0.004$) in the response rate from both countries.

As shown in Table 3, affiliates could be promptly mobilized for industrial actions hence, the study further sought to ascertain whether in both South Africa and Nigeria industrial actions have been an effective way of making governments listen to the yearning of workers. Sixty-four percent (64.0 %) of South African respondents and eighty-four percent (84.0 %) of Nigerian respondents believed that the only language that the government seems to understand when it comes to industrial relations issues, revolves around threats of industrial action and strikes. Both sets of respondents agreed that threatening the government with industrial action is a good weapon for negotiating with the government, but there is a considerable disparity in the rates returned

for both countries. Hence, a significant difference ($p=0.001$) existed when data from both countries were compared. On the whole, results from this section prove that trade union federations do have a relationship with their affiliates; and work together as one, according to the members.

3.3 Trade union federation involvement in political and international solidarity

Most workers join the trade unions with the expectation of being protected from exploitation and believing that trade union federations are the voice of workers, and that they can reverse some governmental policies that are not in favour of members of the workforce. COSATU is able to meet up with this expectation based on their alliance with the ruling party as well as the involvement of their candidates at parliament on ANC ticket (Benzuidenhout, 2000; Buhlungu, 2002). Also in some cases, NLC has mediated between the civil society and the government on some socio-political issues such as minimum wages, fuel price among others that could have led to chaos in the country (Egede et al, 2000; Okafor, 2007).

Table 4 depicts workers' responses to their expectations in terms of how their unions protect and

intervene on their behalf in political-related matters. This section is a response to the objective that intended to ascertain the trade union federation's involvement in politics and international solidarity in

support of workers and the research question that sought to know how often affiliate unions support the trade unions federations in seeking international solidarity.

Table 4. Trade union federations' political influence

Trade unions have the responsibility of protecting workers' economic, political and social well being					Government's economic and political reforms are negotiated by trade unions on behalf of the workforce			
	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square
Disagree	8 (9.0 %)	7 (7.1 %)	15 (8.1 %)	0.130	15 (21.1 %)	20 (21.7 %)	35 (21.4 %)	0.000
Agree	81 (91.0 %)	91 (92.9 %)	172 (91.9 %)		56 (78.9 %)	72 (78.3 %)	128 (78.6 %)	
Total	89 (100 %)	98 (100 %)	187 (100 %)		71 (100 %)	92 (100 %)	163 (100 %)	
Trade unions should campaign against any measure that is aimed at reducing social services benefits								
	South Africa		Nigeria		Total		Chi-square	
Disagree	12 (17.9 %)		12 (12.8 %)		24 (15.4 %)		0.011	
Agree	55 (82.1 %)		82 (87.2 %)		137(84.7 %)			
Total	73 (100 %)		94 (100 %)		167 (100 %)			

The statistical analysis in Table 4 shows that a majority of the respondents from South Africa and Nigeria (91.0 % and 93.0 %, respectively) agree that trade union federations should be responsible for protecting workers' economic, political and social well being. However, chi-square test of associations shows that there is no significant difference in the opinions of the participants from both countries. This indicates that workers have high expectations of the union federations on the issue of their economic and political protection. Furthermore, owing to this high expectation from union members concerning their economic, political and social life protection, trade union federations are striving hard to meet this expectation. Hence, the unions have been trying continuously to contest and reform some of government's economic and political decisions that are not in favour of the workforce.

Participants also positively attested to the fact that their unions have always negotiated with government on their behalf. Seventy-nine percent (79.0 %) of South African respondents agree that their unions contend with government on their behalf, while 78.0 % of Nigerian respondents affirmed the same. The chi-square test analysis, which is $p \leq 0.05$, shows that there is a significant difference in respondents' responses to the statement. More so, union members believed that the union federation should campaign against any measure by the government to reduce social service benefits. In this vein, 82.0 % of South

African respondents agree to this, while 87.0 % of Nigerian participants also agreed. However, a significant difference exists when responses of participants from both countries are associated using chi-square test analysis.

Beckman (2009) and Nwoko (2009) both stated that COSATU and the NLC, respectively, are really fighting for the rights of the people and will defend their interests beyond the official wage economy. The NLC has been involved in attacking the government on political issues that are not in favour of workers, as well as the public in general such as minimum wages, electoral reforms, globalization, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), education-related issues, increase in fuel pump prices, negotiating on workers' conditions of service, external debt, and cost of living (Ademiluyi and Imhonopi 2010; Nwoko, 2009; Oyelere and Owoyemi 2011).

The effect of trade union activities on the economy in both South Africa and Nigeria was examined in the present study. HIV/AIDS is a global pandemic that affects almost everybody. In a global trade context, poorly-paid workers are mostly affected by this scourge owing to their inability to afford the expensive anti-retrovirals. Response to trade union roles and activities concerning the international image of the country as well as their support in seeking solidarity is shown in Figure 1.

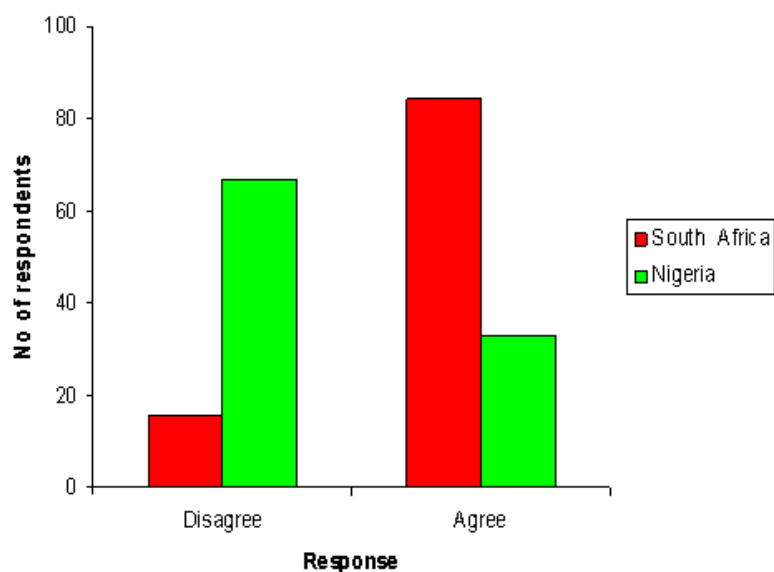
Figure 1. Unions are concerned about members living with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis

Figure 1 shows that 85 % of South African respondents and 33.0 % of Nigerian respondents affirm that their trade union federations support members affected by HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. The meagre proportion returned by Nigerian respondents is indicative of the fact that the NLC is not as concerned about health-related matters of workers' welfare such as these and also that HIV/AIDS infection rates may not be as pervasive in the society. However, the caring nature of the unions as well as their outcry could attract foreign solidarity and support for rolling out medications for such diseases.

3.4 Trade unions leadership, administration and management style

COSATU and its affiliates have about 1,600 full-time officials in various categories such as administrators, organisers, researchers, legal officers and general secretaries to carry out the administrative and

managerial functions of the federation (Buhlungu, 2002; 2003). Conversely, the NLC also has full-time officials working with the executives of the union for the day-to-day running of the organisation (NLC Policy document, 2007). The question here is how efficient are these officials and does the member have a clear understanding of their work with the union leaders? The analysis is a response to the research question that probes the involvement of the members in the administrative set-up of trade union federations and the research objective that investigates members' understanding of trade unions' leadership styles, administrative set-up and general management of the union. Table 5 presents the analysis of both South African and Nigerian respondents' perceptions of their trade union federation's elected executives' usage of power. The perceptions of union members and their understanding of the unions' administration, management and leadership were explored.

Table 5. Executive power usage within the trade union federations

Existence of conflict of power and interest among the executives of the trade union					Trade union administration is affected by nationality, creed and ethnicity			
	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square
Disagree	18 (22.5 %)	17 (17.0 %)	35 (19.7 %)	0.000	22 (27.8 %)	42 (44.7 %)	64 (36.3 %)	0.000
Agree	62 (77.5 %)	83 (83.0 %)	145 (80.3 %)		57 (72.2 %)	52 (55.3 %)	109 (63.7 %)	
Total	80 (100 %)	100 (100 %)	180 (100 %)		79 (100 %)	94 (100 %)	173 (100 %)	

Table 5 shows respondents' knowledge of the existence of conflict of power and conflict of interest among union executives. While 78.0 % of South

African respondents confirmed the existence of this situation, an equally higher proportion of Nigerian respondents (83.0 %) agreed with their Southern

African counterparts that there is conflict of interest and power among the executives. Chi-square analysis shows a significant difference in members' opinions from both countries on the level of the conflicts.

Moreover, the absolute confirmation of the existence of conflict of power and interest among union executives was buttressed by the fact that a majority (72.0 %) of South Africa union members confirmed that nationality, creed and ethnicity played a major role in trade union administration, although a lesser proportion of respondents from Nigeria concurred with this statement. The reason for this may be due to the fact that trade unionism in Nigeria is not heavily skewed along racial lines, unlike in South

Africa where most opinions have racial undertones emanating from the segregationist policies and practices of the past. More so, chi-square analysis clarified that there is significant difference in members' perception of this research statement within the two countries.

The electoral process of the trade union federations was also examined within the context of this study. Trade unions have been said to be an embodiment of true democracy within the countries in which they operate. Hence, to establish the accuracy of the above statement, respondents were asked their opinions about the electoral processes within COSATU and the NLC.

Table 6. Electoral process within trade union federations

Executives are democratically elected with a limited period of tenure					All members have equal rights to contest for any post during election			
	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square
Disagree	10 (14.3 %)	14 (14.7 %)	24 (14.5 %)	0.000	13 (16.0 %)	9 (9.1 %)	22 (12.5 %)	0.000
Agree	60 (85.7 %)	81 (85.3 %)	141 (85.5 %)		68 (84.0 %)	90 (90.9 %)	158 (87.5 %)	
Total	70 (100 %)	95 (100 %)	165 (100 %)		81 (100 %)	99 (100 %)	180 (100 %)	
Union elections are democratically conducted								
	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square				
Disagree	4 (5.5%)	12 (12.4%)	16 (8.9%)	0.000				
Agree	69 (94.5%)	85 (87.6%)	154 (91.1%)					
Total	73 (100%)	97 (100%)	170 (100%)					

Table 6 confirmed that union federation elections are democratically conducted both in South Africa (95.0 %) and Nigeria (88.0 %); all members have equal rights to contest for any post during elections (84.0 % in South Africa and 91.0 % in Nigeria); and that executives are democratically elected with a limited period of tenure (86.0 % in South Africa and 85.0 % in Nigeria). Chi-square analysis showed significant differences between both countries with respect to the study items queried. Hence, the implication is that the national governments of both

South Africa and Nigeria can take a cue from the democratic process taking place within COSATU and the NLC.

Furthermore, decision making within trade union federations was sampled from the responses of affiliates. In this regard, respondents were asked if they were consulted before levies were decided upon by union executives. Table 7 shows the analysis of members' responses about executive decision making within the trade union federations.

Table 7. Decision making within trade union federations

Members are consulted before levies are decided					The executives often take unilateral decisions			
	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square
Disagree	31 (41.3 %)	61 (66.3 %)	92 (53.8 %)	0.000	28 (42.4 %)	15 (15.6 %)	43 (29.0 %)	0.000
Agree	44 (58.7 %)	31 (33.7 %)	75 (46.2 %)		38 (57.6 %)	81 (84.4 %)	119 (71.0 %)	
Total	75 (100 %)	92 (100 %)	167 (100 %)		66 (100 %)	96 (100 %)	162 (100 %)	

Fifty-nine percent (59.0 %) of South African respondents agreed they were consulted before union levies were decided, while 34.0 % of Nigerian respondents agreed. The low proportion of

respondents from Nigeria may be indicative of the high-handedness among NLC officials. Conversely, 58.0 % of South African and 84.0 % of Nigerian respondents affirmed that executives of both COSATU and the NLC often take unilateral decisions even though they believe that these decisions are intended for the improvement of members' lives. However, the high proportion of Nigerian respondents might be owing to the total number of respondents sampled. Chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference ($p \leq 0.05$) between South African and Nigerian trade union members' perceptions of their unions in terms of decision making.

3.5 Gender representation within COSATU and NLC

Two research questions were posed to clarify if executive positions within union federations were gender-representative. General evidence suggests that women are not as well represented and are deprived of opportunities in many areas of life (Francis 1991; Oyesola, 2010). This study, therefore, attempts to confirm whether such deprivation extended to the rights of women in union leadership. Table 8 shows responses to the question asking if trade union policies are in favour of all genders without bias.

Table 8. Members' perceptions of unions' gender representativeness

Female participation is not encouraged at executive level by trade union federations					Trade union policies and activities are structured in a way that favour both genders				
Country		South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square	South Africa	Nigeria	Total	Chi-square
	Disagree	46 (59.0 %)	61 (62.2 %)	107 (60.6 %)	0.000	18 (25.7 %)	59 (62.1 %)	77 (43.9 %)	0.000
	Agree	32 (41.0 %)	37 (37.8 %)	69 (39.4 %)		52 (74.3 %)	36 (37.9 %)	95 (56.1 %)	
	Total	78 (100 %)	98 (100 %)	176 (100 %)		70 (100 %)	95 (100 %)	172 (100 %)	
Gender		Male	Female	Total	Chi-square	Male	Female	Total	Chi-square
	Disagree	56 (56.0 %)	51 (67.1 %)	107 (61.6 %)	0.430	46 (48.4 %)	31 (44.3 %)	77 (46.4 %)	0.187
	Agree	44 (44.0 %)	25 (32.9 %)	79 (38.4 %)		49 (51.6 %)	39 (55.7 %)	88 (53.6 %)	
	Total	100 (100 %)	76 (100 %)	186 (100 %)		95 (100 %)	70 (100 %)	165 (100 %)	

Table 8 depicts the perceptions of trade union members regarding gender issues. A large proportion of both South African (59.0 %) and Nigerian (62.0 %) respondents disagreed that female/women participation is not encouraged at an executive level by trade union federations. Conversely, 67.0 % of females and 56.0 % of males agreed women participation is encouraged at an executive level by the unions. Furthermore, there is a huge disparity between South African (74.0 %) and Nigerian (38.0 %) respondents concerning gender structure of policies and activities. When this question was considered based on gender, both males (52.0 %) and females (56.0 %) agreed that the policies and activities of trade unions were unbiased or in favour of one gender. Finally, a significant difference existed when this research item was considered country-wise, but when considered gender-wise, there was no significant difference.

4 Recommendations and conclusion

Over the years, most industrial actions embarked on by trade unions, especially in South Africa and

Nigeria were a result of defaults or non-fulfilment of collective bargaining agreements between the state and the unions (Nwadaïro, 2010). The International Labour Organization (ILO) convention allows individual countries to determine the kind of machinery of collective bargaining that will go well with the needs of their workforce, but there should be equal representation of employers and workers from the concerned industry (Tajudeen and Kehinde, 2007).

In light of the above, it can be concluded from this study that COSATU and NLC do represent the interests of their members in most crucial areas of trade unionism, but there is a problem in the area of communication and keeping members updated on latest trends before and after some crucial governmental decisions are taken. These have been a major concern for members who thought that they are being sidelined by their executives or rather the executives tend to pursue their own interest at the expense of members. This has in fact made them unwilling to show interest in the unions' activities as well as to encourage non-members to join. It would be recommended, therefore, that proportionate meetings with regard to feedback from central executive

meetings, be scheduled more with members to keep them updated.

Furthermore, pecks and other incentives should be regularly given to members who attend meetings. In making the voice of the workforce more felt where governmental issues are concerned, members should be encouraged to join union-aligned parties, actively campaign for candidates who are union members, and likewise vote for these members during elections, as seen in the case of the Labour Party in Nigeria.

With regard to future research on this subject, a slight limitation of this study emanates from its sample; specifically the South African participants. SAMWU and SADTU are revolutionary while their membership is predominantly African (Ashman & Pons-Vignon, 2014; Southall, 2014; Chisholm et al. 1999). Therefore future study could consider integrating the so-called non-revolutionary trade unions such as Solidarity and National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA). Moreover these unions are not affiliates of COSATU.

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