



International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN)

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1. Background

According to ILO labor statistics, there are at least 5.24 million domestic workers in Africa. It is also estimated that around 70% of these domestic workers across Africa are women. However, these data are only approximations. Indeed, there are no reliable data. Millions of domestic workers are invisible and are not included in labor force surveys, largely because:

- There are numerous young girls carrying out housework and other duties for households that are not their own, either for cash, or board and lodging, or virtually nothing.
- It is common for domestic workers to be related to their employer by kinship; in such cases they remain unpaid and are not regarded as employees.
- In places where domestic work carries a social stigma, domestic workers may refuse to identify themselves as such.
- Domestic workers in Africa are subjected to human rights abuses, and exploitation tends to be concealed by their employers.
- Trafficking into domestic work is growing in several countries in the region; however, there is a need for more studies on this issue.

There is insufficient awareness regarding the living and working conditions of domestic workers in most African countries. The conditions for domestic workers are poor. Many come from rural areas where the social and economic situation is very low and the opportunities of finding employment in either the formal or informal sectors are limited. Hence they resort to internal migration to the towns and cities and beyond their provinces, and in some cases to nearby countries, where they often become isolated.

Although in some countries domestic workers have the same rights as other workers, those rights are frequently being disregarded. This is because labor laws are not being properly enforced. Also, where trade unions for domestic workers do exist, they have not been effective enough in advocating and pressurizing the governments.

2. Goals of the Network

A Strong, Independent, Sustainable and Vibrant Domestic Workers' Network.

In Africa the main objectives of the IDWN have been the following:

- To campaign for an ILO Convention for domestic workers, and ratification of the resulting Convention 189 and its accompanying Recommendation 201.
- To organize and recruit domestic workers in order to build a strong base of trade unions for domestic workers.
- To build the capacity of domestic workers' trade unions.
- To campaign for domestic workers' issues such as the right to a minimum wage, social security, employment contracts, and occupational health and safety.

3. Organizing domestic workers in Africa

Organizing domestic workers in Africa is difficult. This is often because the houses where they work are scattered. Also, many of them do not stay long with one employer, but move on to another. The organizations which do exist generally have inadequate organizing skills. Plus in many countries the laws do not allow domestic workers to organize themselves into trade unions.

However, there have been many positive developments since 2009. In Africa, all domestic workers' organizations are trade unions. These include those which also have workers in other sectors, such as KUDHEIHA of Kenya, CHODAWU of Tanzania, SATRH of Senegal, and SYNIATHA of Mali. Another type is those which have domestic workers only, such as SADSAWU of South Africa, SINED of Mozambique, and SYNTRAD of Guinea-Conakry, just to mention a few.

During this period, domestic workers' trade unions in Africa have been using a number of strategies to organize domestic workers, including:

- **The use of media, both print and electronic:** This has been an effective and powerful tool to bring domestic workers into the unions. For example, in Guinea-Conakry SINED uses radio in all local languages and this has attracted domestic workers to join it. In Tanzania, CHODAWU also uses radio: a union official and some domestic workers are interviewed early in the morning when the employers have gone to work and domestic workers are working alone in the houses. This gives an opportunity for domestic workers to listen, and afterwards they call the union office to join.
- **One-to-one recruitment among domestic workers:** This is a very effective way to organize domestic workers, being practiced by all domestic workers' trade unions in Africa. First, domestic workers do physical mapping where they identify the strategic areas where domestic workers are found. Residential areas, marketplaces, churches/mosques, bus-stops, tap water areas are key places where domestic workers meet during their working time. Domestic workers know each other and help each other to get jobs. Hence, once one or a few are recruited into the unions and are provided with proper services, it is easy for them to share information so that others join the union too. Information sharing is done through mobile phones, or verbally when they meet.

- **Door-to-door campaigns at employers' homes:** This is one of the ways that unions such as KUDHEIHA from Kenya are recruiting domestic workers. Union officials together with a few domestic workers visit the homes where the domestic workers work and talk to them about the union. If they happen also to meet the employers, they explain to them the importance of the union to domestic workers, as well as the role of the employer towards the domestic worker.
- **Setting up domestic workers' committees in residential locations:** This has been an effective means to unite, organize and build the capacity of domestic workers. The committees are given the responsibility to recruit members within a locality, and collect dues and submit them to the union officials. This contributes a lot to building ownership and commitment among the domestic workers' leadership at grassroots level. The meetings are normally on Sundays when domestic workers are free, and this is also when they have meetings with union officials about domestic workers' issues.
- **Meetings and awareness-raising sessions for domestic workers:** When meetings and awareness-raising sessions are held with domestic workers information, education and communication tools and materials, are used, including t-shirts, flyers, posters, etc. Also, union officials come prepared with recruitment forms and union cards. Then, immediately after each meeting, they are able to recruit those who want to join.
- **Participation by domestic workers in public/community events:** Events such as Women's Day, Environmental Day, Workers' Day/May Day are used by domestic workers to convey their own demands while carrying out community activities such as cleaning the environment, planting trees, and the like. This helps to raise awareness among other sections of society.
- **Working with community leaders on issues related to domestic workers:** Involving local community leaders in awareness-raising seminars, studies, and cases relating to domestic workers helps them to understand better domestic workers' issues. They then often help mobilize domestic workers to join the unions.

4. Achievements in Africa

Since 2009, when the IDWN started the campaign for an ILO Convention for domestic workers, there have been a number of significant achievements in Africa:

- **Organizing**

From 2009 to 2013, there was an increase in the number domestic workers' trade unions in Africa from 9 to 17. The membership of domestic workers has also increased greatly, from 30,885 in 2011 to 94,319 in 2013. Fifteen domestic workers' trade unions are members of the IDWN in Africa. Among these, 7 are also affiliates of the IUF. Three further domestic workers' trade unions are potential members. With more effort to map and provide support, there is certainly potential to create more trade unions for domestic workers in Africa.

We have also been able to build alliances and make relationships much stronger with the IUF, WIEGO, ACV-CSC Food and Service Union (Belgium), FES (Germany), ILO offices in the region, ITUC, Global Network, Social Law Project (University of Cape Town, South Africa), Solidarity Center (USA), Southern Africa Trade Union Council

SATUC, and East Africa Trade Union Council EATUC, among others. Their technical and financial support has been a major contributor to the development of domestic workers' trade unions in Africa, for which we are extremely grateful.

- **Awareness-raising**

Awareness about domestic workers rights has been widely articulated in many countries, and this facilitated the establishment of domestic workers' trade unions such as SYNTRAD in Guinea –Conakry, and revival of dormant ones such as KUDHEIHA in Kenya, CHODAWU of Tanzania, CIAWU of Malawi, the United House of Domestic Workers in Zambia, and many others. As they became more active in domestic workers' issues, this made them more visible to domestic workers, governments, employers, and media, as well as to the wider community in their countries.

- **Campaigns**

African domestic workers' trade unions together with trade union centers and trade union councils worked collectively to campaign for an ILO Convention for Domestic Workers in their respective countries and at the ILO Conferences in Geneva in 2010 and 2011. At least three domestic workers - from SADSAWU in South Africa, KUDHEIHA in Kenya, and SYNEHM in Bénin – were, through IDWN support, able to participate as members of their own country's Workers Delegation and witnessed the adoption of C189. To date, two countries in Africa have ratified ILO C189: Mauritius in 2012 and South Africa in 2013.

Specific campaigns for domestic workers' rights for minimum wages, social security such as unemployment benefits, and employment contracts have been conducted in several countries. For example, CHODAWU in Tanzania and the United House for Domestic Workers in Zambia together with their national trade union centers worked hard to pressurize their Governments to give a rise in the minimum wage for domestic workers. In Kenya, KUDHEIHA carried out a media campaign, and held public rallies and demonstrations, and was able to convince the National Social Security Scheme (NSSF) to come up with measures to collect social security contributions from the employers of domestic workers.

- **Capacity Building**

Three sub-regional trainings for domestic workers were conducted to help build domestic workers' trade unions in Africa and raise awareness of the campaign for an ILO Convention for domestic workers: for the French-speaking unions in Cotonou, Bénin, in 2010, and for English-speaking unions in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2009, and in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2011. Altogether, a total of 108 people took part. Through these workshops, demands and case studies were gathered, and strategies to campaign for ILO Convention at country level were identified.

Also, several national workshops were conducted for domestic workers' trade unions: SYNTRAD in Guinea-Conakry, KUDHEIHA in Kenya, CHODAWU in Tanzania, SINED in Mozambique, SYNEHM in Bénin, DSWU in Ghana, and SADSAWU in South Africa. The training focused on imparting knowledge and raising awareness of domestic workers' rights, campaign strategies for an ILO Convention for domestic workers in 2009-2011, and then about the C189 that was won, as well as trade union

education, skills for organizing, communication, lobbying and advocacy, negotiating, and technology such as computers and the use of websites.

- **Building the knowledge base**

Several studies were conducted during this period:

- Occupational Health and Safety in the Domestic Sector in Tanzania, 2010-2011: This study revealed the effects on domestic workers at their workplace, and contributed to the discussion for an ILO Convention for domestic workers at the ILCs in 2010-2012.
- The situation of domestic workers organizations in Guinea-Conakry and CHODAWU, Tanzania, 2012: The studies focused on the working conditions of domestic workers, the representation of the domestic workers in the union structures, and the challenges faces the unions
- Recording working time for domestic workers, Tanzania.

- **Africa Domestic Workers Network (AfDWN)**

Through this increase in capacities and unity, a network of domestic workers' organizations in Africa was formed. The AfDWN was launched at a conference on June 16th 2013, in Cape Town, South Africa. 95 delegates took part. Also present were the IDWN Steering Committee team led by the International Coordinator Elizabeth Tang, as well as the IUF, WIEGO, and ACV-CSC (Belgium) which supported the event financially and technically. Also the presence off the South African union federation COSATU, Global Network, Solidarity Centre, Social Law Project, as well as local domestic workers and media, helped to make the event a great success. There, guidelines for the network were formulated and adopted and AfDWN leaders were elected:

Chairperson: Asmaou Bah from SYNTRAD (Guinea-Conakry)

Vice Chair: Hester Stephen from SADSAWU (South Africa)

Secretary: Raimi Sourakatou Fataou from SYNEHM (Bénin)

Committee members: Alima Elizabeth Sane from SATHR (Senegal), Ester Kosi from DSWU (Ghana), Seif Said Mwera from CHODAWU (Tanzania), Maria Joaquim from SINED (Mozambique), Toindepi Dhure from ZDAAWU (Zimbabwe), and Evaline Mulo from KUDHEIHA (Kenya).

5. Challenges

- **Labor exploitation and social structures**

Domestic work is often embedded in practices of reciprocity, support, and interdependence between relatives, friends or people belonging to the same community. This reduces the legal measures which are taken to protect domestic workers.

Due to high poverty and inequality, HIV/AIDS and malaria mortality, inadequate educational facilities, and poor environmental policies in some African countries, the number of children engaged in child domestic work is increasing. This undermines union efforts towards defending domestic workers' rights.

- **High informal employment and weak legal protection**

Most jobs created in Africa are in the informal economy, and domestic work is one of the main sectors. This means that, in many countries, domestic workers are ignored in official policy and excluded from legal protection. In some countries, for example South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, labor laws do include domestic workers but there is poor enforcement and low compliance. Regulatory authorities usually have very limited staff numbers, with little or no knowledge about domestic workers' situations and how the laws should relate to them. Also they are poorly equipped, with very limited funds to carry out activities such as inspections. Bureaucracy in governments is also a challenge, giving rise to delays in the ratification of C189 and bringing it into national laws.

Also, many domestic workers in the region are not aware of domestic workers' rights and laws or of trade unions for domestic workers. This is because the unions have low coverage, due to inadequacies in material and human resources, in training of union leaders in organizing, communication and leadership, and in record-keeping and management of union membership and finances.

- **Trafficking of women into domestic work**

Though there is no reliable data, there have been some incidences which show that, due to persistent poverty, human trafficking is a serious issue and domestic workers are the vulnerable group in some African countries. Some indicators show trafficking to Arabic countries, for example.

- **Migration and mobility of domestic workers**

The flow of domestic workers is mainly from rural to urban areas. But there is also international migration within the continent: for instance, South Africa receives migrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and Kenya from Somalia, Sudan, Bénin and Burkina Faso. There is a new phenomenon of domestic workers migrating outside the continent. However, studies still need to be done on this.

- **Gender dimension**

Domestic work is carried out by individuals of both sexes and all ages, but with a high percentage of women. As more and more women enter the labor force, they delegate their family care and household tasks to household employees, mostly other women. Domestic work also draws large numbers of young women from countries with high unemployment levels among women, where sex discrimination against them operates in their own national labor markets.

6. Future Plans

The AfDWN intends to bring together and support vibrant unions of domestic workers who are striving and making progress in the realization of decent work for domestic workers, as enshrined in national laws and policies and in keeping with international labor standards as stipulated in C189.

The following is a summary of our plans for Africa:

- (a) **Strengthening the AfDWN:** Through implementation of its activities, the IDWN will work to build and strengthen the AfDWN as a representative structure of domestic workers in Africa. This will be done through sharing information

through emails, Skype and sometimes meetings. Also, when possible, exchange visits will be conducted between trade unions to share and learn from each other and strengthen solidarity and unity among each other. An AfDWN Facebook page will be established to enhance communications. Strengthening the base of the AfDWN will contribute to strengthening the IDWN, through mentoring future leaders and building a stronger financial base. This will better sustain the movement and make it more visible in the region.

- (b) **Increasing domestic workers' membership in AfDWN and IDWN:** An effective campaign in the region about domestic workers' rights will be implemented, and so facilitate existing domestic workers' unions to organize more members and assist the creation of associations and trade unions for domestic workers where they do not yet exist. We will visit potential countries/organizations, invite strategic organizations to our meetings, and collaborate with trade unions centers in the respective countries.
- (c) **Building and strengthening the capacity of domestic workers' trade unions and reach more organizations/trade unions for domestic workers:** This will be done through strategic planning, by identifying the priorities in the region and relevant activities, and building them into a revised action plan. Also, training will be conducted for those organizations which need it, and the training manual will be modified for use by domestic workers. Furthermore, training of trainers will be conducted so as to have a stock of trainers among domestic workers in different areas.
- (d) **Campaign for ratification of Convention 189:** This will be done through activities such as using public events like May Day, media campaigning, lobbying parliamentarians through committees on social issues, mobilizing domestic workers to meet their Minister of Labor, and holding demonstrations in the respective countries.
- (e) **Conduct research on domestic workers' conditions and other identified issues, such as the trafficking of domestic workers:** This will be done in consultation with the IOM, ILO, FES, Solidarity Center, and various research institutions.
- (f) **Document and share best practices:** Through the AfDWN, IDWN affiliates will continue to collect, document and circulate to member organizations examples of good practice in relation to domestic workers' issues such as laws/policies, collective bargaining, employment contracts, organizing/recruitment drives, and campaigns. Consultants will be hired to collect this information from reports, literature and documents. Translation will be done in the respective countries. Later, a booklet will be produced and shared among the AFDWN and IDWN and other stakeholders.