GHANA TUC HOSTS INFORMAL ECONOMY CONFERENCE

by Kwaku Darko Aferi

The Ghana Trades Union Congress will host an International Conference on organising workers in the informal economy as a follow up to the Ahmedabad India Conference held in December, 2003.

The conference which will host eighty foreign delegates and forty local participants will be held at the Miklin Hotel, Accra from 25-29 September, 2006.

The objectives of the conference include, among others, sharing experiences among informal economy organisations, developing strategies to intensify organising in the informal economy, building a network of informal economy organisations and identifying the processes of representation at the international level: the International Labour Organisation (ILO), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and other such bodies.

Participants are expected from around the world and will include trade unionists, civil society activists operating in the informal economy, as well as officials of umbrella trade union organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), ICFTU Afro, and research institutions interested in informal economy activities.

Apart from the opening ceremony which will be addressed by the Honourable Minister for Manpower, Youth and Employment, Boniface Agambila, an official from the ILO and the Secretary-General of the Ghana Trades Union Congress as well as solidarity messages from a host of organisations, the Conference will discuss issues such as collective bargaining and representation, social protection, skills development, law and policy, and organising strategies, both at the group discussion level and plenary sessions.

An exhibition of informal economy activities and products, mainly from Ghana and other participating countries, will be mounted throughout the period of the exhibition. Opportunity will be offered both participants and the generality of the Ghanaian public to buy the products at the end of the exhibition. Excursion will also be undertaken to informal economy groups affiliated to the Ghana Trades Union Congress.

The programme will include an evening cultural event where participants will be expected to don traditional dresses and showcase songs or dances from their home countries.

An International Coordinating Committee (ICC) on Organising Workers in the Informal Economy comprising Self Employed Women Association (SEWA) of India, HomeNET Thailand, Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), StreetNET of South Africa, CROC of Mexico will be in the country a week earlier and join the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) which also serves on the ICC to put finishing touches to the programme.

One hundred and forty people participated in the last conference held in Ahmedabad, India in December 2003.
The decision by Business concerns in the country to provide a unified and coherent front for advocacy, information sharing and best practices, and encouraging an enhanced private sector response to HIV/AIDS through the development of workplace HIV and AIDS products and services is very welcome in many respects.

In the first place, this initiative is imperative because studies conducted in countries where HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are high indicate that companies are faced with high costs of AIDS in the workforce, as evidenced in lost productivity, increasing cost of hiring and retraining, time lost through funerals and higher payment of insurance and medical care among others and significant fall in both total and growth in GDP with its concomitant effects on the fortunes of businesses and the nation as a whole.

Although, Ghana for instance, as at the year 2005, had a national prevalence rate of 2.7, certain regions recorded higher figures. While this picture provides some hope and therefore leeway for inaction, it is also a well known fact that a few years ago countries in certain parts of Africa that recorded similar low figures are today recording higher prevalence figures. HIV/AIDS is dealing a deadly blow to businesses in these countries thereby causing an appreciable decline in their general economic growth.

Again, despite that many business leaders in the country do recognize the long-term threat of HIV/AIDS to their eventual profitability, their attention may be focused on short-term survival in a climate of high interest rate, ever increasing costs of fuel and eminent rise in utility costs. This is appropriately so because most businesses in Ghana have as yet not been impacted directly by the epidemic and there is therefore the tendency for managers and business owners to show reluctance in embarking on workplace intervention programmes to protect their workforce, the pretext often being that such programmes are expensive.

Contrary to the perception of business owners in the country, the results of a study conducted in a Southern African Country attest that businesses that have invested in HIV/AIDS programmes have saved far more money in health care of employees and other related HIV/AIDS issues than otherwise would have been the case.

Clearly, therefore, the evidence of the economic impact of HIV/AIDS strengthens the argument for investing in HIV/AIDS programmes into the mainstreaming process which aims at focusing on the development of holistic workplace policies and workplace programmes as well as priority interventions to address the needs of employees and their families.

While congratulating employers for this laudable initiative, it is our expectation that effective measures will be put in place to sustain the programme so that it does not become a nine day wonder. Workers are equally urged to reciprocate this gesture by working hard to generate more profit, part of which could be channeled to support the programme as their contribution towards the sustenance of the programme.
Vice Chairman of Ghana TUC wins Best Farmer Award

Brother Kojo Brimpong, the National Chairman of the Ghana Mine Workers’ Union (GMWU) and Vice Chairman of the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) has been adjudged the Obuasi Municipal Best Farmer at an Ashanti regional Best Farmer’s award held in the golden city recently.

He cultivates crops and rears animals for commercial purposes.

Presenting the prize, the Municipal Chief Executive Joseph Kojo Boampong described the achievement of the unionist as historic saying it is rare to see miners engage in serious commercial farming whiles in active service.

Addressing friends and family members at a dinner held in his honour after the awards ceremony, the Ghana TUC vice chairman expressed his gratitude to the Ministry of Agriculture for recognizing his effort.

He was hopeful that he will continue to do more to win even bigger awards in subsequent years.

Brother Kojo Brimpong called on policy makers in education to make farming an important subject in the basic schools’ curriculum. Speaking to our reporters after receiving his prize, comprising a table top gas cooker, spraying machine, bicycle, two bars of key soap, two cutlasses, Wellington boots and a certificate, the best farmer held that students in basic schools did not have interest in farming because they are made to work in the school farms as punishment. “The country’s education reform should give premium to agriculture and help change this erroneous impression that weeding or working in the farm is punishment”, he said.

He advised salaried workers to invest part of their monthly earnings, no matter how small it is, in agriculture to guarantee a better retirement life for them. “If you want an investment that will be beneficial in the long run, then invest in the land”, he said.

Brother Brimpong said it was an asset to the nation when people with high educational background entered into farming and other agricultural activities such as animal husbandry.

He called on the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) to introduce special loan package for farmers. “Farmers need capital to buy inputs to improve their operations”, he added.

The Municipal Best Farmer appealed to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to offer the needed logistics to agriculture extension agents to enable them to perform as expected since “farming at this time needs technical approach due to lack of enough land”.

Twenty-four farmers and organizations, including the Tutuka Freeman Methodist Youth Fellowship were honoured for their contributions towards food production in the municipality.
When President Kuffour assumed office in 2001, one of the first things he expressed concern about was the low incomes in Ghana. Five years on we are still grappling with the question and there seem to be no answers. The Ghanaian economy seems to be trapped in a low equilibrium such that even the average growth of five percent per annum in the last two decades has not been able to take workers out of the low income trap.

When we say incomes and pensions in Ghana are low, what do we really mean? And when we say workers should earn ‘realistic’ incomes and pensions what do we have in mind? And the last question is: what are we supposed to do as Government, as employers and as unions?

In this forum, we have been asked to discuss the role of Ghana TUC in ensuring a realistic incomes and pension policy in Ghana. Our presentation will attempt to provide answers to the three questions above. First, we will establish that incomes and pensions in Ghana are low and unequally distributed, based on the official statistics and the data available. Second, we will attempt to answer the question: Why are incomes and pensions so low in Ghana? Third, we will argue that we need a realistic incomes and pensions policy to lift ourselves out of the low income trap. Finally, we will discuss the role of TUC and labour organisations in general in this whole incomes and pension question.

Are incomes and pensions really low in Ghana? To what extent are they low?

The answer to this question is pretty obvious because the majority of us here know and agree that incomes and pensions in Ghana are low. But how low are our incomes? We can assess that based either on absolute incomes or based on relative incomes. Some of us earn incomes that are absolutely low. That means we cannot afford our basic needs with the incomes we earn. In the latest Ghana Living Standard Survey conducted in 1998/1999 many Ghanaians reported that their earnings (i.e., incomes received from work) were below the official national poverty line and the national minimum wage.

The high incidence of poverty in the country is a reflection of the low incomes people are earning from the work they do, both in the formal and in the informal sectors. About 40 percent of Ghanaians were found to be below the poverty line which is estimated to be about $1 a day, based on the latest Ghana Living Standards Survey data. The incidence of poverty was found to be particularly high among food crop farmers (59 percent) and among people in the northern part of the country where, on average, eight out of every ten people were found to be poor. Even among public sector workers over 20 percent were found to be below the poverty line. However, the majority of the poor are low- or semi-skilled individuals engaged in the informal sector.

Does that mean highly-skilled or highly educated individuals are not poor? Some of them complain that they are poor although they can afford basic necessities of life. But
that is not absolute poverty. In their case they are referring to relative poverty. In other words they are comparing their incomes with other people with the same job or the same qualification who earn higher incomes within Ghana or in foreign countries.

A recent study entitled Building State Capacity in Africa: New Approaches, Emerging Lessons published by the World Bank in 2004 revealed that public sector salaries in Ghana are lower than those in some countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa which are at the same level of economic development as Ghana. In 2001, for example, the top public sector salary in Ghana was estimated at $3,275 (in dollar parity terms) compared to $8,523 in Benin, $12,337 in Tanzania, and $13,300 in Uganda. The bottom public sector salaries in Ghana was estimated at $252 (in dollar parity terms) compared to $923 in Benin, $1,045 in Senegal, $701 and Tanzania, and $523 in Uganda.

Earlier studies based on manufacturing data also showed that wages in Ghana are lower compared to wages in Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

So far we have only discussed the level of incomes in Ghana in both absolute and relative terms. We would like to emphasise that the high incidence of poverty in the country and the high rate at which we are losing our professionals are an indication that our incomes are low in absolute and in relative terms and something has to be done about it.

Something should be done urgently because the data available suggest that there is a high tendency for incomes in Ghana to fall but not to rise. For instance, between 1960 and 1983, average income in Ghana was estimated to have fallen by over 200 percent in real terms. In the World Bank study cited above, it was also revealed that the top public sector salaries declined (in dollar parity terms) by 46% between 1992 and 2000 and the bottom salaries declined by 55%.

Low level of incomes and pension is not the only feature of the Ghanaian labour market. Another important dimension of the incomes question has to do with the distribution of incomes. Here we are specifically referring to the growing inequality in incomes in the country in favour of a tiny minority most of whom are well-connected. We are also referring to the income inequality by gender, by region, by industry, and by ecological zone. Generally, Ghanaian men, on average, earn more income than their female counterparts. Those in the southern part of the country, on average, earn more than those in the north. Those in the urban areas, on average, earn higher incomes than those in rural areas. Workers in the mining sector earn far more than those in agriculture. There is nothing natural about that. It is man-made and we can and should change it.

The figures confirm that income inequality is rising in Ghana. According to the last two Ghana Living Standard Surveys, income inequality (as measured by the Gini Coefficient) increased from 0.48 in 1992 to 0.60 in 1999 putting Ghana among countries with the highest income inequality in the world comparable to countries like Brazil and South Africa). In 1992, the bottom 10% of income earners (i.e., the poorest 10%) had the share of 1.2% of the total income and the share of those in the top 10% had a share of 36% of the total income. The income inequality worsened during the 1990s. By 1999, the share of the bottom 10% had reduced from 1.2% to 0.3% while the share of those in the top 10% had increased from 36% to 42.5%. The implication is that many more people are being pushed further down on the income distribution.

We can see this from the data on poverty in Ghana. Despite the relatively high economic growth recorded in Ghana in the past two decades, the incidence of poverty increased in four regions (the three northern regions and Central region) between 1992 and 1999, according to the Ghana Living Standard Surveys. During that period the GDP growth averaged about five percent per annum. What it means is that GDP growth may improve average income levels but it may worsen income inequality if we do not have the right or a ‘realistic’ national incomes policy. The point we are making here is that the relatively high GDP growth Ghana has recorded in the past 20 years may have benefited a very small section of the population and these are likely to be the highly educated men, residing in urban areas and engaged in the formal sector of the economy. The rest of the population may continue to suffer poverty even if the economy grows by 10 percent or more per annum, if we do not adopt a realistic national incomes policy.

So far we have mentioned three

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important characteristics of incomes in Ghana namely (1) the low level of incomes, (2) the tendency for incomes to fall, and (3) income inequality.

Pensions in Ghana have similar characteristics (mentioned above) because they are linked directly to incomes. According to the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT), in March, 2005, some pensioners in Ghana were earning as low as 100c ($1) per month or 1.5 million ($168) per annum compared to the estimated lower and upper poverty lines of 2.2 million and 2.8 million respectively (adjusted for inflation). This means a significant proportion of pensioners in Ghana may be under the lower poverty line.

Whereas some pensioners are in severe poverty, a few of them are receiving a hefty sum of money at the end of every month. In 2004, for instance, some pensioners were receiving as high as 215 million ($23,832) per annum or 215 million cedis we contribute to SSNIT, 23 million cedis go into administration. We are of course aware that one of the major components of this cost is the peculiar imperatives of collection of contributions which demands that SSNIT sets up branch and area offices nationwide to ensure compliance. This is unlike other places where collaboration between tax offices and social security institutions ensure that social security contributions can be collected at minimal cost. Be this as it may, there are however aspects of the administrative costs of SSNIT that have nothing to do with pension administration. We are here referring to activities like the administration of the Students’ loan scheme and the running of SSNIT hospital as well as estates. All these provide reason to support efforts to reform SSNIT to enable it focus on its core functions and to become more efficient.

Why are incomes and pensions so low in Ghana?

We have underlined the low incomes and low pensions. But an important question that needs to be addressed at this point is: Why are incomes and pensions so low in Ghana?

Public officials and employers would want us believe that incomes are low because productivity is low. But the basis of this assertion is usually not clear. Usually people who go about saying productivity is low in Ghana do not back their assertions by hard facts and figures. We have no reason to believe that productivity in Ghana is lower, compared to countries like Benin, Cameroon, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, and other Sub-Saharan African countries. But their wages are higher in purchasing power parity terms. We challenges those who tell us that productivity in Ghana is low to back such statements by facts and figures. We are yet to be convinced.

We are of the strong view that wages are low in the private sector not because productivity is low but because workers are not being offered realistic wages. We are aware that in some sectors such as the mining and manufacturing wages lag behind productivity. Investors are getting too much profit in addition to the numerous concessions including the freedom to keep over 80% of their profits in offshore accounts and the generous tax holidays. Some employers are taking advantage of the lack of alternative job opportunities in the country to cheat their employees. There have been cases where unions have actually been prevented by their own members

SSNIT has been designed in such a way that it favours formal sector workers, the majority of whom are men. The implication is that only a small proportion of women and those in the informal sector benefit from pension
from fighting on their behalf for improved working conditions because they could lose their jobs. Ghanaian workers live by the adage that “half a loaf is better than none”. The situation has worsened since the Government, upon the advice of the IMF and the World Bank, embarked upon mass redundancy exercise in the public sector in the 1980s and 1990s. Ghanaian workers are at the mercy of their employers because of the precedence set by the Government which is the largest employer in the country. Ghanaian workers do not feel secure. If our own Government can do this to us what do we expect profit-motivated employers to do?

In the public sector we are fully convinced that salaries for public sector workers in Ghana are lower than salaries in other countries not because the public sector workers in those countries are more efficient or more effective in service delivery than their Ghanaian counterparts but it is because, in Ghana, our Governments have decided to religiously obey the IMF conditionalities to cap public sector salaries at a lower percentage of GDP. At some point in time in the 1990s, the wage bill of public sector salaries was not allowed to exceed 5% of GDP, thanks to the IMF.

In our view these are the reasons why wages are low in nominal terms. In real terms, our incomes are low because Governments fuel inflation either with hikes in petroleum prices (in recent times) or by literally printing money (in the past) to invest in over-ambitious projects some of which are meant only to win votes. Those who cite low productivity as the reason for low incomes in Ghana should be able to demonstrate that with facts and figures.

Now, assuming that we even agree that productivity is low, the question is: who is responsible for the low productivity and what should we do to improve productivity? When government introduces bizarre educational reforms and our children and teachers are forced to switch from one educational system to another system within unrealistically short period of time as happened to the JSS/SSS system, even when the professional teachers association (GNAT) kicked against that, what should we expect? When employers stop hiring permanent workers and resort to outsourcing and stop training workers at the workplace, what should we expect? We are waiting for those who say productivity is low to provide us with figures.

And even if it turns out that they are right, the second other question we all have to address is: who is responsible – workers, employers or government? What should we do to improve productivity as social partners? We do not see the incomes question as a “chicken and egg” situation. Clearly, wages come first. If you pay people slave wages and keep a huge profit for yourself you get the results in the form of low productivity. Let me elaborate. When an employer hires a worker, even before the worker starts working, his or her wages would have been determined already. The wage is determined in advance based on the perceived productivity of the worker. Employers usually rely on the workers qualifications and experience to determine the person’s ability and his or her wages. That is why qualification and experience are requirements for jobs. After hiring the worker, it is now up to the employer to design and organise the work in such a way that the worker will meet the aspirations of the employer and his or her own aspirations in terms of promotion. Therefore, if we find that productivity is low in a firm, we should check the quality of management first, before we turn to workers. By the same logic if productivity is found to be generally low in the country we should turn to the managers of the economy – the Government.

We would like to reiterate Ghana TUC’s position that in order to improve productivity in this country we should first improve wages. Employers should invest in training of their workers and pay them well. This is theoretically and empirically well-grounded within the efficiency wage model. Firms that use a reasonable proportion of their profits to pay their workers above the market rate are able to reduce worker turnover and workers become more productive. These firms are much more competitive than those who hold on to their profits and suffer productivity losses.

Let’s take a simple example. The tremendous increase in cocoa output in the past few years shows that Ghanaian farmers respond to incentives. It would have been a bizarre policy if for example Government had announced that cocoa farmers should increase their output or productivity before cocoa prices are increased. The right thing

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to do was to increase the share of the F.O.B prices that go to the farmers. When cocoa price increased from €3,475,000 per tonne in 2001 to €9 million in 2003/04 (which was the right thing to do), total output almost doubled from 389,772 to 736,911 metric tonnes during the same period.

In addition to the price increases the Government provided other incentives such as pest control programmes, bonus payments, rehabilitation of roads in cocoa growing areas, introduction and support for innovative farm practices, and financial aid for the children and wards of cocoa farmers. Bonus to cocoa farmers alone has totalled €429 billion since 2001. This is a good policy. Government could have kept all this money. But that would have implications for cocoa output and productivity. We have seen that before in Ghana when, because of poor incentives, cocoa farmers started cutting their cocoa trees and replacing them with maize. The Government has reversed this with better incentives in the form of higher cocoa prices.

In the same manner workers in both the private and public sectors will respond to better incentives. Productivity of workers in the private sector will improve if their share of profits increase and workers in the public sector will be more productive if their contribution to the economic development of the country is appreciated and they are paid accordingly.

The issue of incomes and for that matter pensions seems to be a zero-sum game in Ghana— that is, the positives cancel the negatives. In other words, what workers get employers and Government lose. How then can we solve this apparent conundrum? The answer lies in a ‘realistic’ National Incomes Policy. We need a common national policy framework that will take into account all the different interests and ensure that the social partners play a win-win game. Who said this is not possible? If we want advice on how to design and play such a win-win game we should turn to the Nordic countries and to Ireland for advice and not to the IMF. The IMF does not employ labour economists. It employs monetary economists and they are not the right guys to advise us on incomes and pensions.

We should turn to the Nordic countries because these countries have traditionally involved all the social partners in the national decision-making process, particularly decisions on incomes and employment. Such a model ensures that all social partners take the hard decisions and bear the responsibilities for taking those hard decisions. They also share the benefit equitably. Here in Ghana we have allowed the IMF to strip our governments of their economic and social prerogatives. Social partners play virtually no role in hard political and economic decisions. Our governments set up standing committees with the so-called development partners and meet them either weekly or monthly but no such meetings are held with social partners until there is one form of crisis or the other.

In such a National Incomes Policy, we can address all the issues of low incomes and low pensions as well as inequality that has characterised incomes and pensions in Ghana.

There is the tendency to think that we should only be concerned with those whose incomes are

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below the poverty line. But that may not be completely right. A realistic incomes policy should also address the issue of relative poverty. Why? Because all the highly skilled professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, etc) leave the country for “greener pastures” elsewhere not because their incomes are low in absolute terms, but their incomes are low compared to their colleagues in other countries. In other words they are earning below their potential. In a global labour market place, relative incomes may be more important than absolute incomes because the exodus of these professionals could worsen not only income poverty in the country but also poverty in terms of access to health and education. Even if you have the money, you may have no access to good health service because the nurses and the doctors might have left the country. Or, your children will not have access to good education because all the teachers might have left the country. This is happening in Ghana and it will worsen if we do not stop talking and do something immediately.

**What is the role of Labour?**

In conclusion, let me say a few words about the role of labour. We at Ghana TUC do not think that we should work in isolation. A question such as: What should be the role of organised labour, the social partners and other interested parties would have been more appropriate. Nevertheless, let me address the issue of the role of Ghana TUC and organised labour.

Unions represent workers and our objective function is to protect the interests of workers and to improve their living standards. But we cannot do this if there are no jobs in the first place. We know that our survival as unions and the survival of our members depend on the survival of the businesses we work for. That is why it is ludicrous for anybody to think that unions will want to undermine their employers.

In the global economy we know that our employers should be competitive and our public service should be efficient and effective in order to survive the tough competition. All labour organisations in Ghana will be willing to cooperate with their employers to fashion out ways and means of ensuring that the firms survive this tough competition. But when workers sacrifice they expect their fair share in the booty.

The Ghana TUC has identified its roles already and put them in a form of policy. This policy was adopted in June 2005 (copies are available at the TUC). The objective of our incomes policy is to contribute to the “eradication of income poverty, gross deprivation and social exclusion that affect a large section of the workforce and their families”. (See Ghana TUC Policy on Employment, Earnings and Petroleum Sector Deregulation for further details). The strategies adopted to achieve this objective include continuous and active participation in the on-going tripartite discussion on incomes. At the instance of organised labour, led by Ghana TUC, the social partners have already agreed to determine a living wage in Ghana this year (2006) before the next budget is presented to Parliament. This living wage is defined as a wage that is adequate for the average Ghanaian household which was estimated to be four in the last Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS 4) – a worker, his/her spouse and two children. The social partners have also agreed on the determinants of the living wage. These include adequate food and nutrition, housing, clothing, education, health care, transportation, utilities (water and electricity), child care, and recreation. It is expected that the discussions on the living wage will be completed before the next Budget.

Another strategy is to continue to campaign for a progressive and equitable taxes in Ghana. Ghana TUC entered into serious consultations on taxes with the Ministry of Finance in 2005. The principle that was announced in the 2006 Budget to the effect that no minimum wage earner should pay income taxes and that even those who earn marginally above the minimum will be exempted from taxes to ensure that they are not pushed below the minimum wage was one of the positive outcomes of the series of meetings Ghana TUC held with the Ministry of Finance. We will continue our discussions on taxes this year to ensure that Ghanaians are not overtaxed or overburdened with indirect taxes on petroleum products and other indirect taxes such as VAT.

Furthermore, we will continue to campaign for transparency and equity in salary administration, particularly in the public sector.

On pensions, our policy is to continue to pursue the goal of redesigning SSNIT to reform it to cater for the majority of workers (particularly those in the informal sector) and improve their living standards. We will continue to campaign for a pension scheme for the informal sector.

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sector and women). We would also want to see a minimum pension that is above the official poverty line. Pensioners should not be made to live under the poverty line. In addition, we would like to see a reduction in the pension gap. In the past any time we suggested that pensions should be improved, officials from SSNIT always countered such demands by saying the scheme could not sustain such increases. But when it came to the National Health Insurance and the Government proposed to deduct 2.5% from our contribution, we were told that it would not disrupt the scheme. We believe strongly that the SSNIT scheme can pay pensioners over and above the poverty line if we reduce the inefficiencies in the scheme. We would like to see a more efficient pension scheme. SSNIT has in its medium term strategic plan that it will reduce the administrative cost of running the scheme from the current 23% to 13% in 2007. We will continue to pursue this with SSNIT.

We would like to conclude by drawing attention to the importance of organisation for working people if we are to make any serious progress with achieving better incomes and pensions. Working people need to rededicate themselves to union organisation and to pursue the unity of action of organised labour as well as our eventual organisational unity as the condition for any meaningful achievement.

We must organise, organise, organise and persist in struggling for what is ours for working people’s gains never come on a silver platter.

We express our gratitude to the organisers of this forum for providing the opportunity to make known our position on incomes and pensions. We are determined to keep going until Ghanaian workers receive their fair share for their toil and hard work.

Thank you for your attention.

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**THINK! about THIS**

There are 1.1 billion people without safe water and 2.6 billion without basic sanitation in the world. Water-related diseases are the single largest cause of human sickness and death in the world with some 6,000 children dying from diarrhoea each day.

**Combat disease with Clean Water!**
A study in humans has shown a compound in soya called genistein sabotages the sperm as it swims towards the egg.

Professor Lynn Fraser, from King's College London, said even tiny doses in the female tract could burn sperm out.

She told a European fertility conference that avoiding soya around women's most fertile days of the month might aid conception.

Long swim

Genistein is present in all soya-containing products such as soya milk and many vegetarian foods, as well as some pre-packed meals and pizzas. Avoiding soya products for a few days a month is worth a try.

Professor Fraser tested what happened to human sperm exposed to the compound in a dish in the lab.

The compound kick-started a reaction in a large proportion of the sperm that gives them the ability to fertilise an egg.

In real life, this does not usually happen until the sperm have been inside the female for some hours and are close to completing their long swim towards the egg.

Therefore, if women have genistein in and around the womb this could hamper conception by making sperm peak too soon, believes Professor Fraser.

This could mean they would not be able to fertilise the egg, she told the annual meeting of the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology.

Low concentrations

In mice she found it took higher doses of genistein to cause the reaction, but in humans very small doses were enough.

"We were really surprised. Human sperm proved to be even more responsive than mouse sperm to genistein, responding to very low concentrations - well within the amounts that have been measured in people's blood."

She said it was not yet known how much soya might be a safe amount to avoid this effect.

"It's not a question of completely stopping eating products containing soya.

"But it might be best for a woman to avoid them for a few days around the time she is ovulating."

'Early days'

Professor Fraser's previous work in mice showed that compounds similar to genistein - one found in hop-based products like beer - effect sperm in the same way.

These compounds are all weak oestrogens, but Professor Fraser does not believe that their action on sperm is the same as the female sex hormone.

Instead, genistein seems to trigger the production of a signalling molecule in sperm called cyclic AMP.

Dr Allan Pacey, Senior Lecturer in Andrology at Sheffield University and Secretary of the British Fertility Society said: "It's early days, but clearly if what happens in the laboratory also occurs in the woman's fallopian tube as the sperm make their way to the egg, then there would be the potential for fertilisation to fail."

A spokeswoman from the Vegetarian Society said: "For anyone struggling to become pregnant, avoiding soya products for a few days a month is worth a try if there is even a slim chance that it will help increase fertility."

"Obviously many vegetarians and vegans use soya in their diet, however as there are lots of vegetarian and vegan alternatives to dairy, milk and meat on the market, it shouldn't pose a problem."

• BBC News health report
The Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) has admitted the Ghana Union of Physically Disabled Workers (GUPDW) as an associate member of the union.

Brother Kofi Asamoah, Deputy General Secretary of the Ghana TUC, who announced this in Kumasi said, the rights of disabled workers was the responsibility of all in the society and part of human rights. However, he said, disabled workers can fight for these rights only when they come together as a group as they have done.

Speaking at the first training of trainers workshop for members of the union selected from all the 10 regions, Brother Asamoah said their voices would only be heard and their demands taken seriously when they take their union seriously and work together as one people.

He asked the members to take advantage of such workshops to upgrade their skills for them to also impart their knowledge to their colleagues on the streets so that they will be self-dependent.

The Deputy Secretary General advised the members not to leave the activities of the union on the shoulders of the executive alone but that all should take part in its activities.

Brother Christopher K. Kisseih, President of the Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled, noted that disabled workers have been taken for granted for far too long and therefore the workshop was to boost their capacity to be able to fight for their rights.

He said that, some disabled workers cannot use most facilities at their places of work and other institutions, especially those using wheel-chairs.

Ghana TUC Welcomes Disability Law

by Kwaku Darko Aferi

The Ghana Trades Union Congress has said, the Disability Law is an important “social law” which gives meaning to the constitutional provisions of the dignity of the human person, equality and social justice, and called for commitment from all social partners to ensure the proper implementation of the provisions under the law.

These views were expressed by the Deputy-Secretary General of the Ghana TUC, in charge of operations, Brother Kofi Asamoah immediately after the passage of the Bill.

He pointed out that “people with disability have equal rights to decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity” and that the passage of the bill was an expression of the political commitment to the noble objectives captured in provisions of the law.

Brother Kofi Asamoah emphasized the need for government to establish institutional mechanisms, with the requisite institutional and resource capacity for the implementation of the social policies implied in the law, adding that, that was important for the law to have real meaning and for the rights conferred by it to make a real change in the lives of people with disability.

He said the enforcement of some of the provisions would require the radical transformation of facilities in public and private buildings and factories for the convenient use of people with disability.

He said the opportunities that will accrue from implementing the law are great and suggested the setting up of an effective monitoring body, by the government, to ensure that the provisions of the “social goods” materialize. “Ghana TUC is ready to play its role in contributing to the effective implementation of the law and we will enhance the capacity of all our Staff including those in the all regions and districts so they can monitor and evaluate implementation initiatives by the government and other partners”, he added.

“Unless all these enforcement and implementation structures are established, and unless government shows a practical commitment to the implementation and enforcement, these important social rights will be nothing more than formal political rights which are only on paper but can not be translated into any real change of the rights of people with disability in our society,” he continued.

Brother Kofi Asamoah praised the government and parliament on the implementation of the Bill.
The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC), UK, have observed that most of the economic reform policies being pursued by most governments in Africa, in line with the dictates of the international financial institutions, end up further impoverishing the masses and remain a great challenge in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This was contained in the recommendation reached at the end of a three-day regional workshop organised by the NLC/TUC (UK) Women’s Development Project in Abuja.

These bodies observed in addition, the lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanism in the implementation of the MDGs and the lack of active trade union involvement in the process.

They also observed the slow pace of integrating gender issues into Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) and that while eight Core ILO Conventions enjoy wide range ratification by countries other relevant Conventions such as convention 156 on workers with family responsibilities and 183 on maternity protection are being neglected.

The workshop which drew participants from Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Ghana TUC and the Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC) had the theme Consolidating Women’s Involvement in Trade Union Activities.

Sister Alberta Anita Adjei, 2nd Vice Chairperson and Sister Dorcas Amoquandah represented the Ghana TUC.

The workshop assessed the benefits of networking within the sub-region and the implementation of recommendations reached at the first regional workshop held in Nigeria in December 2004. It also shared experiences based on follow-up activities of national centres after the first regional workshop and reviewed the ILO core Conventions on women, gender and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Progress Report.

Also of great concern was the major recurring issue, which is still the lack of budgetary allocation for the activities of the women committees and gender units of national centres.

The body urged gender officers to adopt the strategy of working out an action plan of activities to be carried out with specific budget for each activity. This way, women activities would be carried out.

They called on National Centres to ensure the integration of gender issues in Collective Bargaining Agreements. This Day (Nigeria)
Decent work to help win equality

On International Women’s Day (March 8) the International Labour Organisation has called for the promotion of decent work to help in the global quest for gender equality and social justice.

The ILO’s campaign for decent work is built on core labour rights – which include freedom from discrimination.

“Decent work will have a far-reaching impact. It will mean workplaces that genuinely support gender equality. And it recognizes that raising incomes and opportunities for women will help lift families out of poverty and drive economic and social progress,” said ILO Director General Juan Somavia in his International Women’s Day message.

Glaring inequities persist in workplaces throughout the world, warns Mr Somavia. In spite of progress in recent years with 200 million more women at work - 40% of the world’s workforce but 60% of the world’s working poor - “the pay gap is still a reality. The “jobs gap” between men and women - especially in terms of quality - remains wide”.

Women in decision-making positions remain very much in the minority. Care responsibilities still fall heavily on the shoulders of women.

“Policies and practices that fail to support women at work threaten women’s hard won progress. In so doing, these policy failures also work to the detriment of children and families, communities and societies.”

Women are transforming the world of work and are continuing to make inroads in the world of sport - the focus of this year’s Women’s Day celebration at the ILO.

“Opportunities for women are increasing. Gender gaps in the workforce are slowly shrinking. Women’s education and entrepreneurship are rising. And more women than ever before are completing higher levels of education and moving into senior management positions,” said Mr Somavia. ILO

Women are indispensable at the workplace.
The Secretary-General of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Brother Akwasi Adu Amankwah, has stressed the need to strengthen linkages between financial institutions and the agricultural sector.

“The linkage is too weak,” he said, and pointed out that the banks, which were the centres of business, needed to reposition themselves properly in that respect.

Brother Adu Amankwah stated this at the opening of the 21st biennial delegates conference of the Ghana Commercial Bank (GCB) Employees Union in Kumasi at the weekend.

It was on the theme, “Working with passion to attain excellence in the banking industry”.

The TUC boss restated the need for the banks to reduce their lending rates, stressing that the high rates were constantly becoming a disincentive to investment in the country and something needed to be done about the situation.

He explained that while the financial institutions were quick to offer low interest rates for customers who deposited monies with them, they charged huge interests on loans offered customers and stressed that such activities always militated against investment drive.

He challenged the GCB to take the initiative of coming out with products that would attract the private sector to do business with them to prove that financial institutions had something to offer so far as the development of the country was concerned.

Brother Adu Amankwah expressed concern about the negative attitude of some bankers when transacting business with customers and urged them to change such attitudes to enhance their business.

He said while some banks had well-trained staff who easily attracted customers, others had taken it for granted that any person could transact business with customers and, therefore, employed people who had no experience in doing business with customers.

He also called on financial institutions to initiate measures that would enhance the competence of their staff to enable them to handle customers in a more efficient and effective way.

In his address, the Managing Director of the GCB, Mr Lawrence N. Adu Mante, said the banking industry was being driven by forces such as the general economic conditions, technology, social values and lifestyles, as well as the population, demographics, legislation and regulations.

He said issues relating to suppliers, customer service, substitute products, rival banks and new entrants were also among the competitive factors which were also impacting changes on competitive intensity and industry profitability.

Mr Adu Mante pointed out that notwithstanding the numerous challenges confronting the banking industry, “customer satisfaction is key to delivering shareholder value”, stressing that “with the advent of corporate governance, the ultimate is delivering stakeholder value”.

In his welcoming address, the acting National Chairman of the GCB Employees Union, Brother Ismail Muhammed Kamil, said with effective collaboration between workers and their employers, the GCB had been able to network 122 of their branches without any government funding. "Working with passion to attain excellence in the banking industry"
When the General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Brother Guy Rider, challenged trade unions in Africa to form a new trade union movement to respond positively to challenges engendered by globalization, many perhaps were the skeptics who thought nothing good would come out of the call.

One month on, however, the two giant unions on the African continent, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions/African Regional Organisation (ICFTU/AFRO) and the Democratic Organisation of African Workers’ Trade Unions (DOAWTU) have taken steps towards the unification of the two unions.

At a meeting in Accra recently, the leaders accepted the challenge and began consultations aimed at unifying the two unions, in tandem with on-going discussions at the international level to merge the ICFTU and the World Council of Labour (WCL).

The forum discussed ways of broadening understanding between the ICFTU-AFRO and DOAWTU on historical perspectives, governing bodies, membership, and criteria for affiliation, relationship with other organizations, staffing and responsibilities, resolutions, priority areas of work, assets, liabilities and finance.

The Leaders agreed to exercise flexibility in the promotion of the culture of unity in order to achieve greater collaboration between trade unions, especially at the national level and promised to explain the process at the grassroots level as a way of courting the support of members at the shop floor.

As an expression of their commitment to carry the unification through to its logical conclusion, the leaders suggested that the Kenyan capital should be considered headquarters for the new African regional trade union organization while DOAWTU’s physical facility in Lome, Togo, was transformed into a training institute.

The Leaders also decided to extend invitation to the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) to be part of the pan-African trade union movement.

They agreed to work towards drafting a constitution for the new Regional trade union organization after the publication of the draft already developed for the new global trade union organization.

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The Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) has received a Collective Bargaining Certificate (CBC) empowering it to negotiate the terms and conditions of service on behalf of all teachers in employment with the Ghana Education Service in accordance with the Labour Act of 2003.

Part II of the Labour Act 2003 (Act 651) which deals with trade unions and employers organisations took effect from March 31, 2004, and requires a trade union to obtain a CBC before it could negotiate the terms and conditions of service with employers on behalf of a particular group of workers.

Mr Fosu Apenten, acting Chief Labour Officer and Registrar of Trade Unions, says both the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) and the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) applied to be considered for the certificate, but GNAT with more members, was given the certificate.

Mr Apenten presented the certificate to Mr Joseph Kwaku Adjei, president of GNAT at a meeting of the National Council of the Association in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region. Daily Graphic
The Local Government workers union has attained full membership status of the Local Government Service Council and has acquired collective Bargaining Certificate from the Registrar of Trade Unions (Chief Labour Officer) on behalf of all classes of workers in the Local Government Service which covers employees in the Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies.

The General Secretary of the Union, Brother William Mensah, made this disclosure at the National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting of the Local Government Workers’ Union held in Accra, recently.

Brother Mensah urged the NEC in session to strive hard and build stronger ties with social development partners in order to remove the uncertainties surrounding the implementation of the decentralization programme, especially regarding the transfer of functions, split of responsibilities, timing and sequencing, staffing and funding.

He stressed the need for social dialogue to address insufficient pay and non-competitive terms and conditions of service that have adversely affected recruitment and retention of skilled staff in the Local Government Civil service.

The Director of the Business School, University of Ghana and Chairman of the Local Government Service Council, Nana Yaw Boakye Danquah, who presented a paper on “The New Local Government Service”, as part of the programme said, decentralization is a complex and multidimensional issue that affects several facets and levels of public administration and involves not just the political institutions but also administrative structures, human service delivery, planning, fiscal autonomy and financial management, and citizen participation, among others.

Nana Yaw Boakye Danquah explained that successful decentralization is contingent upon how well each of these dimensions interacts to support local level development and governance.

He said, while much attention has been given to the issue of decentralization in Africa, especially in the areas of finance and planning, the issue of staffing, discipline and productivity, the interface between public servants and administration etc. has, at best, received peripheral handling.

New members of the National Executive Committee were sworn into office during the programme.

A call has been made to Government to change the name of the District Assemblies fund from District Assembly Common Fund to “District Assembly Development Fund”.

The call was made at a one-day meeting between officials of the Secretariat of the National African Peer Review Mechanism and Leaders of the Ghana Trades Union Congress to discuss the Country Review Report and Programme of Action of the Republic of Ghana.

The General Secretary of the General Agricultural Workers’ Union (GAWU), Brother S. A. Kanga, who made the call, explained that the word common used as part of the name for the fund provides enough enticement and therefore basis for the misuse of the fund.

The General Secretary said, “The description of the fund as “common” could be a recipe for the abuse of the fund because not very much importance is usually attached to things that are described as being common”. He believed that the name District Assembly Development Fund will ensure that the money is utilized for the development of the districts and noting else.

The Chairman of the National African Peer Review Secretariat, Professor Agyepong said, in spite of the fact that the Secretariat is independent of government; government has an office that ensures that recommendations from the secretariat are dealt with expeditiously.

He urged the Ghana TUC and other non-governmental agencies to play an active role in the programme to ensure that the objectives of the programme are achieved.

Other speakers parted the back of the Secretariat on the good job it is doing especially the inclusion of an action plan that details a time table for the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

The Secretary-General, Brother Kwasi Adumankwah and his two deputies, Brothers Kofi Asamoah and J. N. Y. Atopley, General Secretaries of National Unions, Heads of Department of the Ghana Trades Union Congress as well as a host of workers in the Hall of Trades Union Congress, partook in the discussions.
Ghanaian trade unionists, members of farmers’ or ganisations and NGOs were among a group of protesters who clashed with Hong Kong city security officials towards the end of a demonstration recently. The protest march, which started at the Harcourt Gardens, near the police station in the heart of the city, drew hundreds of protesters from several countries including, Ghana, the Philippines, Taiwan, the USA, Korea, Zimbabwe, South Africa and many others.

The protest was against the implementation of the WTO’s General Agreements on Trade in Services, GATS, which calls for the liberalisation and privatisation of major social services, including water, which the demonstrators say should be under public ownership and control.

According to Brother Kingsley Ofei Nkansah, the Deputy General Secretary of the General and Agricultural Workers Union of the TUC, the demonstration began with a rally at the Harcourt Gardens with addresses by various civil society leaders from around the world who had earlier delivered written protest notes at their embassies in Hong Kong. The speakers denounced the WTO, USA, international financing institutions, especially the IMF and the World Bank as agents of poverty in the world, especially in developing countries.

The 6th WTO Ministerial Conference was attended by more than 12,000 state delegates and advisors, NGO representatives, community groups, members of parliament, and other civil society representatives. There were also hundreds of other people representing a myriad of interests such as human rights, the environment and energy conservation, gender, education, trade unions, and any cause you can imagine who were all in Hong Kong to seek publicity for their interest. The most vociferous group was made up of Korean farmers who were leading the protest movement in Hong Kong.

The Wan Chai district of Hong Kong, which includes the Convention Centre, the site of the conference looked more like an army garrison than a city hosting a conference on trade. There were security forces at every street corner and they were all in battle-ready gear and formation. Their differently coloured hats indicated that they had been drawn from several armed services and provinces. When this reporter tried to find direction from some of the young soldiers at one of the Convention Centre’s many entrances it became clear that these soldiers were not very familiar with the geography of Hong Kong.

According to Brother Ofei Nkansah, the march was policed by a large contingent of Hong Kong security forces who tried to prevent the demonstrators from reaching the Convention Centre but they were overran by a breakaway section of the marchers composed mostly of Korean farmers. This resulted in a two-hour standoff with the protestors divided in two with one half behind the police lines. Eventually, the other half tried to storm the police lines and it was at this point that the forces deployed their latest weapon: the pepper spray. Ghanaian trade unionist, Brother Andrews Tagoe, the Informal Sector Organiser of GAWU, was one of the five protestors who caught pepper spray in their eyes but recovered his sight without any damage.

“The General Agreement on Trade in Services, GATS, is one of the main targets of protestors at the WTO. It is an agreement that seeks to enforce the liberalisation of social services and turn the provision of services such as water and health into profit-making machines for the rich. Brother Ofei-Nkansah explained that GATS undermines trade union work and relevance by restricting workers interests to only the narrow relations between employers and employees instead of defending the larger interest of public service and people’s rights. Public Agenda

(Left-Right) Sister Emelia Ghansah, Brother Kingsley Ofei-Nkansah (Dep-Sec. General) and Brother Andrews Tagoe (Extreme Right) all of the General and Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) of Ghana TUC
GAWU organise training programme on family laws

by Kwaku Darko Aferi

The General Agricultural Workers Union of the Ghana Trades Union Congress and the Gender Centre have organised a five-day training programme on family laws at Kade in the Kwaebibirem District for forty-seven farmers of the Nkyinkim Anti-Violence Project of Old Ntronang, Subriso-Ankenkaasi and Atobriso communities.

The programme was aimed at educating the participants to acquire knowledge so that they could in turn support victims of Domestic Violence, in the community.

The participants were taken through the impact of traditions and customs especially on customary marriage and divorce and the necessary solution to problems related to them.

Part of the education also centred on the Children’s Act, the Rights of Children, Parental Rights and Obligations and PNDC Law 111, the Intestate Succession Law, which dwells on gender roles and how they affect the status of women as well as children.

Sister Adwoa Sakyi, Gender Officer of GAWU and Project Co-ordinator of the Nkyinkim Anti-Violence Project said, GAWU believes in human resource development and has therefore been educating the people on their civic rights and obligations as well as skills that help improve standard of living.

“The education in particular has brought about many changes in the lives of the people especially in the area of decision-making and improvement in marital affairs”, she continued.

Madam Emelia Agyapong, Executive Director of Gender Centre, one of the resource persons for the programme said both men and women should respect one another for peace and harmony to prevail for the socio-economic development of the country.

She said “knowing ones rights alone is not sufficient for good and peaceful living; people must also know their obligations”.

In his contribution, the District Chief Executive of the area, Mr. Yaw Boakye said, children and women’s affairs were very important in nation building.

He advised the participants to impart the knowledge they have acquired to other people in their communities.

Mr. Boakye thanked GAWU and the Gender Centre for the programme and urged them to continue such programmes to raise the standard of the people as a way of reducing poverty in society.

HIV/AIDS made a workplace issue

Business concerns in the country have formed a non-profit, non-political, voluntary, charitable private sector-led organization to champion the cause of the private sector as a National Response against HIV/AIDS.

Known as the Ghana Business Coalition Against HIV/AIDS, the Coalition aims at providing a unified and coherent front for advocacy, facilitation of information sharing and best practices, and encouraging an enhanced private sector response to HIV/AIDS through the development of workplace HIV and AIDS products and services.

The Coalition will set up a world-class web portal on HIV/AIDS information that can be used by the business community to develop HIV/AIDS strategies in the workplace and beyond.

It will develop further, the capacity and skill development opportunities in advocacy for workers, especially women’s groups, so as to empower them to become part of the mainstream development programming in all spheres of life.

The Coalition will effectively network with existing local and international role players that are fully engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS with relevant Sector Ministries, Private Business Associations, and other development partners including both local and international NGOs, to promote effective development, at all levels, from Large Multi-National Enterprises, Large Local Enterprises, to small and Medium Scale Enterprises.

Members of the Business Coalition Against HIV/AIDS shall be composed of companies, organisations or institutions which will be admitted to membership by the Board of Trustees.

Funding for the Coalition’s work will come from an initial donation from the ILO, UNAIDS, Ghana AIDS Commission but will ultimately and substantially rely on yearly subscription by member organisations.
Mrs Akosua Frema Osei Opare, a former Deputy Minister for Manpower, Employment and Youth, has called on the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) to assist government to create awareness on the Labour Act and to ensure that the Act is implemented.

She noted that, the Act should engage all Ghanaians, because it was a comprehensive social protection document, and a blueprint for the protection of the rights of workers in the country.

She was addressing a symposium organized by the Ghana TUC in Accra.

The symposium, under the theme: “Trade Unions Organising for Social Protection”, was aimed at sensitising workers on Ghana TUC’s continuous relevance and create awareness on the need for the various unions under it to champion the course for a greater social protection for Ghanaians.

Mrs Opare agreed that the level of social protection in the country was not enough but said government was doing all it could to improve on the existing Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS).

She said the new GPRS, would evolve strategies that would pay attention to issues of vulnerability and exclusion, and thus, culminate into a national social protection.

She noted that with the formal sector, the new strategy recognizes there was more to improving their social security protection, other than simply relying on the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT).

She said government was looking at supporting human resource development, which would provide training and personal development for workers to protect them against unemployment.

The new strategy is also looking at the extension of social protection with new ideas to fill the gaps identified in the old poverty reduction strategy document.

The deputy Minister observed that micro insurance was limited in the country, saying, it was necessary to facilitate it with some support from government and the private sector to promote social protection insurance.

She said Ghana was also looking at labour intensive public work, where government guarantees some months of work for everyone and that it was seeking to learn from countries practicing these measures. These measures, she said, if pursued would help workers in Ghana and cater for their future. She called on the Ghana TUC, as well as the public to make inputs into the document before its is finalized.

Brother Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, Ghana TUC Secretary-General noted that in the democratic society that Ghana seeks, a solidarity based society was essential to ensure that those who participate in the political process develop confidence in it and see democracy as the means to secure economic and social justice.

“Social security vis-a-vis solidarity, between the young and older generation, between the healthy and the sick, between workers in employment and those deprived of it, these provide the guarantee for avoiding exclusion and alienation and for creating the conditions for genuine economic and social progress”, he said.

“If out of a worker population of eight million, only 15 per cent have a way to social protection, then, there is a deficit in the country.”

The Secretary-General held that, people still needed to work after retirement because the level of social protection was very low in the country, adding, “There is still a lot of room for extended coverage of social protection in the country. This is an essential demand”.

He identified some of the factors that affected the ability of unions to fulfil their responsibility with regards to social protection as pluralism and disunity that was affecting the cohesion in the Ghana TUC. He said if the unions wanted to move away from a weak social protection, they have to unite within their ranks and improve internal democracy within the union, and called for the efficient management of the unions.

GNA
NEGOTIATION PROCEDURES

NEGOTIATION IN GOOD FAITH

1. Parties to an industrial dispute shall negotiate in good faith in the first instance to resolve the dispute in accordance with the dispute settlement procedures established in their respective Collective Agreements or Contracts of Employment.

Time for concluding negotiation

2. The negotiation shall be concluded within seven working days after the occurrence of the dispute.

Records of negotiation process

3. (i) The parties shall keep written records of the negotiation process and the outcome signed by both parties.
   (ii) Where the parties cannot agree to sign a consensus record together, each party may present its own record duly signed.

Failure to resolve dispute by negotiation

4. If the dispute remains unsolved after seven working days, either party shall refer it to the Commission for the appointment of a mediator.

Failure to exhaust procedures in Collective Agreement

5. Where the Commission is satisfied that the parties have not exhausted the procedures established in the Collective Agreement or have not agreed to waive those procedures, the Commission shall order the parties to comply with those procedures within the time determined by the Commission.

MEDIATION PROCEDURES

Complaint to be in writing

6. The complainant shall submit a written complaint to the Commission or complete Form ‘A’ (Complainant Form) specified in the Schedule to these Regulations and submit it to the Commission.

Time within which to respond to complaint

7. (i) The Commission shall within three working days serve the other party with a copy of the complaint and request the other party to the dispute to respond to the complaint in writing within fourteen working days after the receipt of the Commission’s request.
   (ii) Where a party to a dispute fails to respond to the request of the Commission within the stipulated period of fourteen working days, the Commission shall send a final notice to the party concerned to respond within a further seven working days after which the Commission shall proceed to determine the case.

Choice of mediator

8. After the receipt of the response in regulation 7, the Commission shall provide both parties with the list of mediators for the parties to make a selection of a mediator or mediators.

Appointment of mediator

9. The commission shall appoint the mediator or mediators jointly chosen by the parties to mediate in the dispute.

Failure to agree on choice of mediator

10. Where the parties of a dispute fail to agree on a choice of mediator the Commission shall, with two working days, appoint a mediator or mediators to mediate in the dispute.

Time within which to conclude mediation

11. The mediation shall be concluded within fourteen days after the appointment of mediator.

Dispute settle through mediation

12. (i) Where at the end of the mediation there is settlement of dispute, the terms of the settlement shall be recorded and signed by the mediator and the parties to the dispute.
   (ii) A copy of the signed terms of settlement shall be lodged with the Commission.

Binding settlement

13. The settlement referred to in regulation 12 shall be binding on the parties.

Duty to co-operate in mediation efforts

14. The parties to the mediation process shall co-operate in the mediation efforts.

Failure to settle through mediation

15. Where there is no settlement at the end of the mediation process, the mediator shall immediately declare the dispute as unresolved and refer the dispute to the Commission within three working days for voluntary arbitration.

Conflict of interest

16. (i) A mediator shall disclose in writing any interest of whatever nature in a dispute referred for mediation.
   (ii) Upon consideration of the interest by the Commission, the mediator may be changed unless the parties to the dispute consent in writing to retain the mediator.

Voluntary arbitration

17. Where a dispute is referred to the Commission under regulation 15, the Commission shall, with the consent of the parties, refer the dispute to an arbitrator or an arbitration panel for voluntary arbitration.
Failure to agree on choice of arbitration
18. Where the parties to a voluntary arbitration fail to agree on the appointment of an arbitrator or an arbitration panel, the Commission shall, within three working days, appoint an arbitrator or arbitration panel.

Disclosure of interest
19. (i) An arbitrator shall disclose in writing any interest of whatever nature the arbitrator may be changed unless the parties to the dispute consent in writing to waive this option.
(ii) Upon consideration of the interest by the Commission, the arbitrator may be changed unless the parties to the dispute consent in writing to waive this option.

Time within which to submit statement of issues or questions in dispute
20. Within three working days after the appointment of an arbitrator or arbitration panel, the parties to an industrial dispute shall submit to the arbitrator in writing a statement on the issues or questions in dispute signed by one or more of the parties or their representatives.

Failure or refusal to sign a statement of issues or question in a dispute
21. (i) Where a party to a dispute fails or refuses to sign a statement as required in regulation 20, the statement may be submitted without that party’s signature.
(ii) A statement pursuant to sub-regulation (1) shall state that the other party has failed or proceed with the arbitration despite the fact that only one party has signed the statement of the issue.

Failure to appear before an arbitrator
22. If a party fails to appear before the arbitrator or arbitration panel after the expiration of seven working days after being notified, the arbitrator or arbitration panel shall proceed to hear and determine the dispute.

Time within which to conclude voluntary arbitration
23. The voluntary arbitration process shall be concluded within fourteen working days after the date of appointment of the arbitrator or arbitration panel or within the extra time determined by the Commission.

Voluntary arbitration award binding
24. The decision of the arbitrator or a majority of the arbitrators shall be binding on the parties.

Arbitration award to be communicated
25. The arbitrator or arbitration panel shall, within seven working days of the last sitting, make an award and communicate the award to the parties and the Commission within seventy-two hours.

COMPULSORY ARBITRATION

Compulsory arbitration by the Commission
26. If a dispute remains unsolved within seven working days after the commencement of a strike or lock out, the dispute shall be settled by compulsory arbitration by the Commission.

Content of notice to be served by the Commission
27. (i) Where a dispute is referred to the Commission under regulation 26, the Commission shall serve a notice on the parties

a. stating what in its opinion the unsolved issues are between the parties, and
b. asking the parties whether they agree to three working days.
(ii) the parties shall respond within three working days.

Composition of Compulsory Arbitration Panel
28. A compulsory arbitration shall comprise three members of the Commission, one member each representing Government, Organized Labour and Employer Organisation.

Time within which to conclude compulsory arbitration
29. A compulsory arbitration process shall be concluded within fourteen working days after service of the notice in regulation 27.

Compulsory arbitration award binding
30. The award of the majority of the arbitrators in a compulsory arbitration shall be binding on the parties.

Publication of compulsory arbitration in Gazette
31. A compulsory arbitration award shall immediately on completion be published in the Gazette and other State media by the Commission and copies shall be given to the parties to the dispute.

Appeal against compulsory arbitration award
32. Appeal against a compulsory arbitration award shall lie to the court of Appeal on questions of law only, within seven working days after the publication of the award under regulation 31.

SUMMARY SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTE BY THE COMMISSION

33. (i) After the receipt of a compliant in accordance with regulation 6 and a response to the compliant in accordance with regulation 7, the Commission may, after giving the parties to the dispute the right to be heard, settle the dispute summarily without recourse to mediation or arbitration.
(ii) Where a party to a dispute fails to respond to a complaint in accordance with regulation 7, the Commission may determine the compliant without recourse to that party and the decision of the Commission shall bind on the parties to the dispute.
(iii) The commission may re-open a dispute which has been determined under sub-regulation (2) if a party to the dispute on application within fourteen working days after the determination of the case provides reasonable explanation for the failure to respond to the complaint.

PROCEDURE FOR RESOLVING DISPUTE FROM ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Disputes resolution in Essential Services
34. Parties to an industrial dispute in essential services shall endeavour to settle the dispute within three days after the occurrence of the dispute by negotiation.

Referral to the Commission after failure to resolve dispute
35. If the dispute remains unsolved after the expiration of the three days referred to in regulation 34, the parties shall within the next working day refer the dispute to the Commission for settlement by compulsory arbitration.
Compulsory arbitration by the Commission
36. The commission shall not three working days after the dispute has been referred to it, constitute a compulsory arbitration panel to settle the dispute by compulsory arbitration within fourteen working days.

STRIKES AND LOCKOUT PROCEDURES

Notice of intention to strike or lockout
37. Where
(a) the parties fail to agree to the refer a dispute for voluntary arbitration, or
(b) a dispute remains unresolved at the end of the arbitration proceedings, either party intending to take strike action or prepare for lockout, shall give written notice of the intended action to the parties to agree to refer the dispute to another arbitration, terminate the arbitration proceedings.

Time within which strike or lockout action can be undertaken
38. Strike action or lockout may be undertaken after the expiration of seven working days from the date of the notice referred to in regulation 37 and not at any time before the expiration of that period.

Effective date of notice of strike or lockout
39. The seven working days referred to in regulation 38 shall begin to run from the date of receipt of the notice by the Commission.

PROHIBITION OF STRIKES OR LOCKOUT IN RESPECT OF ESSENTIAL SERVICE
40. An employers carrying on, or a worker engaged in an essential service shall not resort to a lockout or strike in connection with or in furtherance of an industrial dispute in which worker in the essential service are involved.

COOLING-OFF PERIOD
41. A party to an industrial dispute shall not resort to a strike or lockout during the period when negotiation, mediation or arbitration proceeding are in progress.

PROCEDURES FOR MAINTAINING A DATABASE OF MEDIATORS AND ARBITRATORS AND FEES

LIST OF MEDIATORS AND ARBITRATORS
42. The commission shall mention a list of industrial relations mediators or arbitrators who meet the criteria of the Commission.

APPLICATION TO BE LISTED AS MEDIATOR OR ARBITRATOR
43. A person who seeks to be listed as a mediator or arbitrator shall complete and submit an application form which may be obtained from the Commission.

MEDIATORS AND ARBITRATORS NOT EMPLOYEES OF COMMISSION
44. A person appointed as mediator or arbitrator of the Commission does not become an employee of the Commission.

DISQUALIFIED MEDIATOR OR ARBITRATOR
45. A person appointed as a mediator or arbitrator is not qualified to serve in that capacity if the person has a financial or other interest in the undertaking or employers’ worker’s organization involved in the dispute, unless the parties to the dispute agree to the appointment in writing despite the disclosure of the interest.

REMOVAL FROM THE LIST OF MEDIATORS AND ARBITRATORS
46. A person listed as a mediator or arbitrator may be removed from the list by the Commission on the grounds that the person
(a) no longer satisfies the criteria for admission,
(b) has been repeatedly or flagrantly delinquent in submitting reports to the Commission,
(c) has refused to make reasonable and periodic reports in a timely manner to the Commission concerning activities related to mediation or arbitration,
(d) has been the subject of complaints by parties who use the services of the Commission after cancellation, or
(e) has died

NOTICE OF REMOVAL OF MEDIATORS AND ARBITRATORS
47. A mediator or arbitrator list on the database may only be withdrawn from the list at any time by giving the Commission thirty days notice in writing.

MEDIATION AND VOLUNTARY ARBITRATION FEES
48. Fees shall be in conformity with Government Consultancy rates obtained from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.

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Government and Employers laud Ghana TUC’s role

Government and the Ghana Employers Association (GEA) have lauded the Trades Union Congress (TUC) for being a good collaborative partner in entrenching the culture of social dialogue in recent times.

The two, who are the major partners of the Tripartite Committee in the determination of minimum wage in the country, saluted the Ghana TUC during a special grand musical concert and awards ceremony in Accra.

Speaking on behalf of the government, Mr Joseph Adda (former Minister of Manpower Youth and Employment), expressed satisfaction that organised labour, in recent times, had modernised its tactics on strikes. He said hitherto, strike used to be a first line of action with little regard to the due process of negotiations that did not help in the promotion of effective collaboration as partners.

Mr Adda commended the TUC for its enterprising abilities and said the Government was prepared to welcome any proposals that will help to further extend the horizon for venturing into business.

Mrs Rose Karikari-Anang, Executive Director the GEA, said the Association’s relationship with the TUC was relatively cordial and that the level of understanding had also been boosted.

“We found the Ghana TUC a body that is committed to social dialogue. A solid partnership is the only sure way of achieving productivity and improving incomes levels of workers,” she said.

Brother Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, Secretary-General of the Ghana TUC, paid tribute to all unionists, dead or alive, who have contributed in diverse ways to bring the Union to its current state.

He said there was the need for Ghana TUC to extend trade union coverage to the wider sections of the public and to support affiliate bodies to negotiate for better conditions of service for their workers.

Awards were presented to 70 current and past trades unionists. GNA

Timber and Woodworkers Union calls on government to salvage timber industry

Timber and Woodworkers Union of the Ghana Trades Union Congress, has made an urgent appeal to government to reduce the tax on the export of timber to save the industry from total collapse.

This was contained in a statement signed by the General-Secretary of the union, Brother Joshua Ansah, after an emergency meeting held in Accra to deliberate on the crises currently confronting the timber sector.

It said; “in view of the alarming threats confronting the timber industry and labour force in the sector as a whole, the union would humbly appeal to the government to urgently arrange a meeting among stakeholders, to help salvage the industry from further decline and lay-offs”.

The statement explained that the timber industry was being crippled by unbearable levies, taxes and charges including a 400 percent increase in stumpage fees, one percent concession and management fees and five per cent stumpage fees as social responsibility charges.

Others, it said, are three per cent of gross values on all exports for marketing and promotion and 10 per cent on all air-dried lumber, as export levy.

“Between January and July this year alone, more than 3000 workers were laid off by employers and there is every indication that more than 2000 workers will be laid off again in the next few weeks, if nothing is done to check the unbridled taxes on exported timber.

In another development, the Ghana Timber Millers Organisation has taken a swipe at the government for refusing to reconsider its position on the regulatory measures in the form of taxes and levies currently guiding the timber industry.

The President of the organization, Mr. Maxwell Owusu, who cited the earlier call made by the Timber and Woodworkers Union, corroborated the job loss cited by TWU. He said, the number of workers who have lost their jobs since the beginning of the year are about 9,000 when account is taken of casual workers who have also lost their job.

He speculated that at least 15,000 workers could lose their job this year if government refused to heed to the call to take a second look at the taxes.

He indicated the important role the timber industry play in national development, especially in addressing the unemployment problem, and concluded that if this role got lost the results will be disastrous for many people and the nation at large.