

**Community Unionism in Africa: The Case of Mozambique**  
**Le syndicalisme communautaire en Afrique : le cas du Mozambique**  
**Sindicalismo comunitario en África: El caso de Mozambique**

Pauline Dibben et Sara Nadin

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Résumé de l'article

L'analyse des résultats nous indique que le syndicalisme communautaire est bien vivant au Mozambique. L'engagement syndical avec la principale organisation communautaire représentant l'économie informelle (ASSOTSI) semble être l'élément clé de cette stratégie de revitalisation. Les deux parties bénéficient de cette relation qui semble viable. Il y a cependant certaines questions eu égard à cette viabilité à long terme. D'abord l'ASSOTSI représente les travailleurs illégaux alors que l'organisation syndicale OTM regroupe les travailleurs de l'économie officielle. Ensuite, l'OTM a une relation proche avec le gouvernement vu son passé socialiste alors que l'ASSOTSI a une relation plus fragile avec ce même gouvernement. Finalement, l'ASSOTSI ne représente que des travailleurs africains. Des représentants seniors de l'OTM semblent se questionner sur la pertinence de soutenir un modèle qui inclut toute l'économie informelle (propriétaires et travailleurs). L'OTM envisage plutôt de mettre sur pied un syndicat pour représenter les travailleurs du secteur informel.

Cet article se fonde sur une recherche en profondeur que nous avons effectuée sur la façon dont le syndicalisme communautaire s'est exprimé dans cette économie émergente d'Afrique. Plus particulièrement, nous avons cherché à répondre aux questions suivantes : l'engagement avec les organisations communautaires est-il caractérisé par une approche stratégique ou à la pièce ? À quel niveau y a-t-il bénéfices mutuels pour le syndicat et l'organisation communautaire ? Cette relation est-elle viable à long terme ?

Dans un contexte de libéralisation, de privatisation et de crise financière, les syndicats subissent un déclin dans le nombre de leurs membres. Dans les économies émergentes, telle celle du Mozambique, le secteur formel ne représente que 8 % de la main-d'oeuvre, alors qu'environ 75 % des travailleurs se retrouvent dans le secteur informel, les autres étant sans emploi. Dans plusieurs pays, les syndicats ont cherché à impliquer ces travailleurs du secteur informel dans le syndicalisme communautaire.

# Community Unionism in Africa: The Case of Mozambique

Pauline Dibben and Sara Nadin

**Against the background of liberalization, privatization and financial crisis, unions face a declining number of core members. In emerging economies, the informal economy represents a large and growing proportion of the workforce. In many countries, unions have sought to engage these workers through “community unionism.” This article draws on in-depth research to investigate how community unionism has been employed in Mozambique, an emerging economy in Africa. In doing so, it asks whether trade union engagement with community organizations is characterized by a strategic or piecemeal approach, the degree to which there are mutual benefits, and whether the relationship is sustainable in the longer term. Analysis of findings suggests that community unionism is vibrant within Mozambique, but that questions arise regarding its longer-term viability.**

**KEYWORDS:** Africa, trade union, informal economy

Against the background of declining membership in the formal sector, trade unions in emerging economies have engaged in a number of strategies to increase their influence including: lobbying central government, forging international linkages, and embracing broader social concerns. These strategies have had varying degrees of success (Waterman, 2001; Dibben, 2004). One of the largest challenges facing trade unions is the growing informal economy, where workers face variable working hours, health and safety infringements, and low pay (Breman, 2009).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, pay rates in the informal economy are often unstable (ILO, 2002).

The successful organization of these workers might provide the opportunity for increasing trade union membership. Yet, should trade unions invest their resources in the informal economy or focus on core workers? If organizing those within the informal economy, should they incorporate them into existing unions or set up a dedicated union? And what are the benefits and challenges of “community

Pauline Dibben is Senior Lecturer in Employment Relations, Management School, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK (p.dibben@sheffield.ac.uk).

Sara Nadin is Lecturer in Human Resource Management, Management School, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK (s.j.nadin@sheffield.ac.uk).

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unionism,” a concept that has been more often applied to advanced economies (see, for example Wills, 2001; Stewart *et al.*, 2009), but might also be applicable to emerging economies? Can relationships with community organizations in Africa be regarded as characteristic of “community unionism?”

This article draws on exploratory analysis within Mozambique to consider how community unionism has been applied in an emerging economy within Africa, a continent where the role of unions is particularly important, given that workers face a lack of infrastructure, high levels of poverty, and inadequate law enforcement. Mozambique shares with many countries in Africa a large informal economy accounting for over 75 percent of the labour force (AfDB/OECD, 2008).<sup>2</sup> The country has been recognized for its strong post-conflict recovery. However, it is still one of the world’s poorest countries. Life expectancy at birth is still only 47.9 years (World Bank Group, 2009) and although the country has experienced a GDP growth rate of over six percent since 1996, and the doubling of revenue from tourism between 2004 and 2008 (AIM, 2009), it is strongly reliant on foreign-owned mega-projects (OECD, 2008) and on donor funding (De Renzio and Hanlon, 2007). There is relatively little existent literature on human resource management and employment relations in Mozambique, with the exception of analyses of two surveys (Webster *et al.*, 2006, 2007; Wood *et al.*, 2011; ILO, 2009), research examining employment in rural areas (Cramer, Oya and Sender, 2008); qualitative research on the informal sector undertaken in 2002-3 (Lindell, 2008, 2009) and broader analysis of trade union renewal (Dibben, 2010).

The next section examines the broader role of trade unions in Africa, and is followed by a section that assesses the notion of “community unionism,” leading to the determining of the more specific research questions that will be used to inform the remainder of the article. Subsequent sections summarize the research methods used to explore the relationship between the trade union and the organization representing the informal economy within Mozambique and then detail key findings. The concluding discussion considers the longer term prospects for union representation of vulnerable workers in the informal economy.

## **Trade Unions in Africa**

In considering trade unions in Africa, it is important to acknowledge that they are not a homogenous group. Historical variations relate to whether the country was a former colony of Britain, France or Portugal; there are differences in terms of ethnic diversity, and politically, countries have been marked by dictatorship and democracy, socialism and capitalism, and economically, by large variations in gross domestic product (Horwitz, 2007). Nevertheless, it is possible to discern a number of general trends in industrial relations. Trade unions were a relatively late development in Africa. However, from the 1920s they undertook

direct action in countries such as Kenya, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, followed by the much cited copperbelt strikes in 1935 and 1940 when Africans protested against living and working conditions (Henderson, 1973). After 1945, the colonial powers generally supported the growth of trade unionism, largely seeing them as a way of helping to keep social peace (Henderson, 1973; Schillinger, 2005), while in the 1950s, unions took a more political role, working with the nationalist political elite. However, it was arguably still the case that “industrial action was reserved for industrial ends” (Henderson, 1973: 297). It seems to be generally considered that unions played a key role in working with nationalist political parties to end independence, but once colonialism was ended, they were either sidelined or incorporated as an arm of government (Henderson, 1973; Schillinger, 2005).

In the 1980s, unions in many African countries began to assert more independence from government, partly due to structural adjustment programmes (Schillinger, 2005). However, the relationship between trade unions and political parties has continued to be the subject of much discussion. Relationships between trade unions and government have included dimensions of incorporation and resistance in Southern Africa, and pluralism and autonomy in West Africa (Beckman and Sachikonye, 2010). In some African countries they have played a significant political role, most notably in South Africa, where COSATU, the trade union federation, worked with the ANC and socialist parties to overcome apartheid in South Africa. Then, in common with unions in other parts of Africa, such as Eritrea, Kenya, Botswana, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa and Mozambique, the union federation subsequently formed part of a tripartite alliance (Wood and Brewster, 2007). However, it “vigorously pursued its own interests with a strategy of mass action combined with engagement and negotiation with the state” (Maree, 1998: 31). Meanwhile, unions have developed linkages with international organizations such as Global Union Federations and the International Labour Organization, yielding benefits in funding and educational programmes (Croucher, 2007).

More recently, the main challenge for unions across many parts of Africa has been the reduction in the proportion of permanent formal sector jobs and the accompanying growth of more precarious work arrangements, with many workers based within the informal economy (Webster, 2004). This has presented “a major challenge to the credibility of organized labour” in Africa (Beckman and Sachikonye, 2010). In Africa, up to 90 percent of rural and urban workers are in the informal economy. However, the highest levels are generally within low-income countries (ILO, 2002).

Contributory factors toward the growth of the informal economy include: colonialism, and government policies of liberalization, restructuring and privati-

zation (Willems *et al.*, 2006; Wood and Brewster, 2007; Lindell, 2008). These government strategies were largely undertaken due to the requirement by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the 1980s for structural adjustment programmes, and resulted in massive job reductions (Willems *et al.*, 2006). Many workers ended up in the informal sector, where work was not taken by choice, but tended to be low paid with poor working conditions (Breman, 2009). A key strategy for trade union revitalization has therefore included coalition building with other organizations (Frege and Kelly, 2003), more recently in order to represent the informal economy (Gallin, 2001; Horn, Bonner and Jones, 2008).

### **Community Unionism**

Community unionism can be viewed as a response to the decline in union membership over recent years in both advanced and emerging economies, and as a strategy used to enable revitalization and renewal through reaching those who have traditionally remained outside of trade unions (Wills, 2001; Tattersall, 2009). It has been simply defined as “trade unions acting in concert with non-workplace-based community organizations” (Greenwood and McBride, 2009: 211), and in many respects can be regarded as echoing the traditional trajectory and role of unions (Clawson, 2003). The concept offers potential benefits for the community being represented, and also for trade unions, allowing unions to raise their political profile and access new groups of workers (Wills, 2001: 468).

In terms of its origins, community unionism can be viewed as one element of social movement unionism activity (Stewart *et al.*, 2009). Social movement unionism has itself been defined in a number of ways, and the subject of much debate, but is generally assumed to include features such as: political engagement with government, forging international level links with unions, and links with community organizations outside of the workplace (see Waterman, 2001; Dibben, 2004). However, doubts have been placed on the ability of unions to act as social movements. From an advanced economy perspective, Wills (2001: 471) doubts the ability of unions to rethink “their objectives, structures, strategies and culture to become more like genuine social movements.” Similarly, von Holdt (2002) questions the ability of trade unions to act as social movements within South Africa due to divisions between groups of workers.

Community unionism is arguably not as wide ranging as social movement unionism, yet it also presents challenges. Firstly, unions may not share similar interests or concerns as community organizations (see Tattersall, 2009; Cockfield *et al.*, 2010). The latter may have been established for a wide range of reasons, some of which may not directly relate to unions’ concerns (Osterman, 2006). However, the representation of those in insecure, contingent and informal

sector work is an area where unions have sought to extend their reach in recent years, both in advanced economies (see, for example, Heery *et al.*, 2004) and in emerging economies (Webster, 2004). In countries such as Ghana, Malawi and Zambia, they appear to have worked closely together as a result of shared interests and, for unions, tackling the needs of the informal sector appears to have been an important strategic objective. In Ghana, a number of traditional unions extended their activity to include informal sector workers in jobs as diverse as cooks, beauticians, photographers, butchers, agricultural workers and woodworkers (ILO, 1999; Gallin, 2001). However, the informal sector union, the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) is an affiliate of the federation Ghana TUC, while the StreetNet Ghana Alliance (SGA) for street vendors, market vendors and hawkers merely uses the Ghana TUC offices (Willems *et al.*, 2006). Meanwhile, in Malawi, there is a union specifically for the informal sector, the Malawi Union for the Informal Sector (MUFIS), formed in 2001.

Secondly, and relatedly, unions may not see community unionism as a core element of their strategy. Stewart *et al.* (2009: 216) find that at one end, union involvement with wider society beyond the workplace is a “central strategic objective” while at the other end, union involvement with community initiatives can be “piecemeal, tentative and in some cases hostile.” However, relationships can change over time, moving from ad hoc relationships, to support coalitions for single issue campaigns, to mutual support coalitions with greater bonds of trust and an element of shared decision-making, through to deep coalitions, which have commitment from union leadership, and embrace community-wide concerns, and provision of financial resources. These changes can lead trade unions to change existing structures in order to adapt to engagement with community organizations (see Tattersall, 2009), or merely adjust existing strategies to address the needs of different groups of workers (Wills, 2001; Heery *et al.*, 2004).

Thirdly, although both unions and community organizations may benefit from closer relationships, there can be different degrees of benefit for both parties. As Wills (2001: 471) argues : “Trade unions have forged alliances on their terms, to support a particular campaign or to win a particular political issue...but they have not formed seemingly equal partnership with those beyond their ranks.”

In situations where both parties benefit, partnership becomes a “mutual gains enterprise” (Kochan and Osterman, 1994), referred to elsewhere as “reciprocal community unionism” (Wills and Simms, 2004: 65). However, building relationships with other organizations can result in a dilution of union focus (Nissen, 2004), and trade union suspicions of broad based organizations that appear to be undemocratic (Holgate, 2009). Moreover, unions can see

community organizations as a potential threat, supplanting the union role, as happened in Kenya, where NGOs and other civil society organizations entered into collective bargaining on behalf of small and micro enterprises (Fashoyin, 2007). Meanwhile, community organizations may resent being used by unions for their own gains (Russo and Corbin, 1999).

A fourth challenge is the issue of sustainability. Even where there are strong coalitions between trade unions and community organizations, these may not be durable over the longer term (Greenwood and McBride, 2009). The SGA, representing traders' associations in Ghana was set up by the union federation but is considering whether to become fully independent in the future (Willems *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the Malawian MUFIS has applied for affiliation to the MCTU, but the union federation and affiliates have disagreed on whether there should be a separate union for the informal economy, or whether existing unions should organize informal economy workers (Willems *et al.*, 2006). These tensions cast some doubt on the long term viability of relationships. Relationships may be influenced by a range of other actors, including the state (Martinez Lucio and Perrett, 2009; Cockfield *et al.*, 2010). In Ghana, for example, the GPRTU collects taxes from the informal sector, restricts entry to the sector, and settles disputes between employees and employers (Croucher, 2007), but it has reputedly enjoyed patronage from the ruling party and government in return for loyalty and support, serving owners rather than workers (Adu-Amankwa, 1999).

Taking these aspects together leads to the determination of three research questions:

- Is union engagement with community organizations a central strategic objective or characterized by a piecemeal and tentative approach?
- Are there mutual benefits for the trade union and the community organization?
- To what extent is the relationship sustainable in the longer term?

These questions form the focus of the remainder of the article.

## **Methodology**

The research that this paper draws upon was conducted over a period of five years, reflecting the difficulty of researching this topic: "By its nature, the development of community unionism is slow, multi-faceted and difficult to research" (Wills, 2001: 475).

This article draws upon primary documents and statistical data from the International Labour Organization, international donors, Mozambican news reports, the 2007 Census, as well as relevant policy documents from trade unions,

in addition to exploratory research involving interviews and non-participant observation. The triangulation of methods enabled a degree of corroboration and comparison (Denzin, 1989).

The findings are broadly based on five research visits which were carried out between the years 2004-2009 and included a total of 58 interviews. Purposive sampling was employed as a result of gatekeeper issues. In 2004, a scoping study entailed interviews with academics and NGOs working in Mozambique. In 2005 and 2006, the focus of research was on the broader economic, political and infrastructural context, and participants included those at director level in government departments including the departments for: Ports and Railways, Industry, Commerce, Investment Promotion, Quality Standards, and Privatization, together with donor agencies such as DfID, Freidrich Evert Stiftung, and USAID. Interviews in 2007 and 2009 were conducted with a range of experts on industrial relations and the informal sector in Mozambique: Gustavo Mavie, the Director of Mozambican News Agency; Paul Fauvet, the Senior Journalist and Editor of English Newsdesk of the Mozambican News Agency; Director A, the Head of Labour Relations and Social Affairs of OTM; Director B, the Head of International Relations of the main trade union federation the OTM; and the President, Vice President, Head of Cabinet, and Head of Operations of ASSOTSI, the main organization representing the informal sector. These latter interviews provided the majority of the detailed evidence presented in this article.

The interviews were semi-structured with questions covering the political and economic context, infrastructure, labour market trends, employment security, the nature of informal sector work in Mozambique, the characteristics of informal sector workers, perceptions of informal sector work, government policy and the regulation of informal sector work, and representation of informal sector employers and workers through the trade union federation and ASSOTSI. All interviews were tape recorded, with the participants' consent, and fully transcribed. Each lasted between one and two hours. The analysis of data was facilitated by the use of NVivo, a software package for analyzing qualitative data using open and axial coding (Richards and Richards, 1994). Main themes were determined by the key issues around which the interviews were structured, and emergent themes resulted from further questioning of the data.

In 2009, interviews were supplemented by non participant covert observation. While being cautious regarding personal safety, it was possible to walk and drive around different parts of Maputo and its suburbs and in doing so observe "vendedores," commonly referred to as those selling goods in fixed places, and "ambulantes," those walking around the city from place to place. Field notes were made as soon as practicable following the observations whilst discreet photography provided a visual record.



## Findings

The first section will outline the nature of the informal economy in Mozambique and the main organization representing it. Following sections examine the questions outlined above: Is union engagement with community organizations a central strategic objective or characterized by a piecemeal and tentative approach? Are there mutual benefits for the trade union and the community organization? And, to what extent is the relationship sustainable in the longer term?

### **The Informal Economy in Mozambique and the Role of ASSOTSI**

As mentioned above, around seventy-five percent of workers in Mozambique are employed in the informal economy or engaged in agricultural work (AfDB/OECD, 2008). The growth in the informal economy of Mozambique can be at least partly attributed to the Sixteen Years War (1976-1992) which increased migration from rural to urban areas (Willems *et al.*, 2006). In urban areas, most of those in the informal economy sell goods, either from static pitches on pavements or in markets, or by walking along the streets, as “ambulantes” (Director, Mozambican News Agency, 2009). Working conditions in the informal economy are generally poor. Working hours are polarized between very short (under employment) and long hours. Most workers have little or no social security from their employers or the government, and do not receive maternity, sick leave or paid annual leave (ILO, 2009). Many workers in the informal economy are women (Willems *et al.*, 2006), including married women supplementing their husband’s income, those who are single, and those who are widowed and trying to support their children (President, ASSOTSI, 2009). The informal economy is also known for the use of child labour (Fauvet, Senior Editor, News Agency, 2009), and young boys were observed selling goods from open boxes (field notes, September, 2009).

The products sold were varied and included goods aimed at the tourist market and everyday goods such as: fresh produce, bundles of zips, donuts, and new and used shoes. Those sold in formal markets included: live chickens, fresh vegetables and fruit, packaged food products and toiletries, and hot meals (field notes, September 2009). In contrast, goods sold in informal markets were generally illegal (Director, Mozambican News Agency, 2009).

ASSOTSI (an association of operators and informal workers) is the main organization representing 40,000 informal sector workers, the majority of whom (24,000) are women (President, ASSOTSI, 2009). The organization represents independent traders, traders who informally employ some workers, and also informal sector workers. One of the main initiatives of ASSOTSI has been to establish market committees in city marketplaces. The committees collect fees

from stallholders and provide basic infrastructure such as water and toilets, carry out maintenance work, and organize cleaning and security. They also control access to selling space and solve labour conflicts arising from the breaching of informal work contracts. Where issues cannot be solved at the local level, they are addressed by provincial committees. ASSOTSI also has an executive committee (Lindell, 2009).

### **Union Engagement with Community Organizations: A Strategic Objective?**

The main union federation, the OTM, originated in 1983 from “production councils,” created by the then socialist government in 1976. From 1985, national unions were created and these were affiliated to the OTM national council, although in 1992 three unions left OTM to form a rival federation, CONSILMO (Director A, OTM, 2005). In 2009, the OTM had 16 union affiliates and around 250,000 members (Director A, OTM, 2009).

The union has faced a range of challenges. Firstly, it has struggled to become independent, illustrated by its inability to secure public sector recognition; government employees still do not have full rights to organize and bargain (ICFTU, 2006). Secondly, unions have struggled to organize at workplace level due to the devastation of the transport infrastructure during the war, employer attempts to break the power of labour through outsourcing (interview with Castel-Branco, 2007), a lack of employer compliance with collective agreements (Webster *et al.*, 2007), and the large number of small workplaces (INE, 2007; ILO, 2009). Thirdly, the union lost around 20,000 members as a result of privatization during the late 1990s and early 2000s, with many now working in the informal sector (Director B, OTM, 2007).

Strategies to increase membership and influence have included attempts to influence government policy on job creation and participation in national level organizations including: PARPA (poverty programme), NEPAD (a regional organization for African development), the National Institute of Social Security, and through negotiation under the tripartite commission, which sets the minimum wage (Director B, OTM, 2007). However, the union’s influence is limited by late receipt of government reports prior to negotiations and a lack of legal, technical and economic resources (Artur, 2004). Other strategies have included working with international organizations and engaging in transnational campaigns on macroeconomic policies and the promotion of worker rights (Bezuidenhout, 2000). A further approach has involved working with other organizations to embrace broad concerns; the federation has a women’s worker committee and a national council of HIV/AIDs, participates in civil society forums, and has an affiliated organisation of retired workers (Director A, OTM, 2007). Additionally,

and of particular concern here, is the federation's strategy of reaching out to those employed in the informal economy.

Aware of the large number of union members who had turned to informal sector work after losing their jobs, the OTM federation created ASSOTSI, an association representing operators and informal workers (Director A, OTM, 2009). The relationship with ASSOTSI is now included in OTM's national plan, largely due to the number of workers that it represents:

ASSOTSI is the biggest member of OTM...No union has the [equivalent number of] members. National unions have [around] 15,000 [members] and so on. But ASSOTSI has 40,000 members so is the biggest. Then OTM makes ASSOTSI a priority in terms of training and supporting [it] (Director B, OTM, 2009).

In addition to setting up ASSOTSI, the OTM also seeks to encourage representation of informal sector workers in agriculture, encouraging them to join SITAF, the national union of agriculture (Director A, OTM, 2009). CONSILMO, the other union federation in Mozambique, does not seek to address the needs of the informal sector in the same way because its affiliated unions do not represent workers in commerce (Director A, OTM, 2009).

The OTM has not changed its structures to deal with the informal sector, and ASSOTSI fits into the OTM's existing structures as an affiliate.

Our system is one company, one union. The companies together must be affiliated to a union. And the union can be affiliated to the federation. That is our system...ASSOTSI is an affiliate of the OTM (Director B, OTM, 2009).

The union does, however, appear to be willing to support ASSOTSI in a range of ways, including providing training courses on legislation, business support and microfinance, lobbying government on issues such as including informal sector workers in the national insurance scheme, encouraging agricultural workers to join relevant national union, providing office space to ASSOTSI, and helping it to link to international organizations (President, ASSOTSI, 2009; Director A, OTM, 2009). Moreover, ASSOTSI is apparently very much regarded as part of the federation, since ASSOTSI members are invited to OTM meetings and have their headquarters in the OTM building (Director B, OTM, 2009).

The union has, however, been criticized for extending its operations and not focusing on representing formal sector members (interview with Castel-Branco, 2007). In focusing on its work with ASSOTSI, it may therefore be neglecting its core membership:

The trade union...is for the people employed...But when it comes to the problem solving of these [informal sector] people, it is [the responsibility of] these associations [such as ASSOTSI] (Director, Mozambican News Agency, 2009).

## **The Trade Union and ASSOTSI: Mutual Benefits?**

The OTM benefits from linkages to ASSOTSI due to the large number of workers represented by the latter organization. As mentioned above, it is the largest affiliate within OTM. In return, the OTM assists ASSOTSI in a number of ways. As mentioned above, the OTM assist ASSOTSI in engaging with local government. However, although leaders of the OTM encourage ASSOTSI to engage directly with local government, they take the lead in representing their interests at higher levels of decision making:

In central government, OTM are representing ASSOTSI... ASSOTSI is not a member there [in the Tripartite system]...If ASSOTSI has a question for government, they can come to OTM... [Or] if OTM see that an issue is related specifically to ASSOTSI we will go to ASSOTSI...But the normal thing is [for us] to inform ASSOTSI of what is happening. OTM has the responsibility to represent ASSOTSI (Director B, OTM, 2009).

Moreover, the OTM also represents ASSOTSI to the large employer's organization, the CTA:

CTA is a confederation of employers in the formal sector. And ASSOTSI is an association for the informal sector. They are not similar. There are not relations in terms of formal relations, but if ASSOTSI wants to discuss something with the CTA it can do that... through OTM (Director B, OTM, 2009).

Therefore, the OTM seems to take care to ensure that the affiliated organization does not rival its influence at higher levels of decision-making.

## **The Sustainability of the Relationship between OTM and ASSOTSI**

From the above discussion, it appears that there are mutual benefits for both organizations. Nevertheless, there are some potential tensions that might threaten the longer term relationship. Firstly, the OTM is a legally recognized union federation that was set up by the socialist state. In contrast, ASSOTSI represents people working illegally:

The former mayor, and the one who tried to do something about it in this city, to make some difference, he tried to get rid of the market, but he became so unpopular, because it's the way of living of so many people (Director, Mozambican News Agency, 2009).

The national government has, however, apparently "legitimized" ASSOTSI's role over time, recognizing its contribution in fighting against poverty (Director A, OTM, 2007). For example, it has given ASSOTSI responsibility for dealing with importers:

The government sees the job of the association as very important, and the government wants more jobs in ASSOTSI. For example, when they started doing their job the

importers and exporters were not included, but the government sees it as very important to give that job to ASSOTSI.... So when you go to the border, you are going to find ASSOTSI is there doing the job with customs, working together to check the goods when they go out of the country (Head of Operations, ASSOTSI, 2009).

In other words, ASSOTSI has been given preferential treatment over other associations representing the informal economy, such as Mucuerro, the Association of Informal Sector Traders and Importers for cross-border trade, which has been operating since 1999 (Willems *et al.*, 2006), and by 2009 had around 1,000 members (Director A, OTM, 2009). The government has also sought their help in moving workers in the informal sector into the formal sector, through organizing meetings so that the government could explain the benefits of an ID card to those in the informal economy. As a result, the workers now have ID related to their tax contribution which has increased payment of taxes (Director B, OTM, 2009).

Moreover, although relationships with local government officials appear to have been tense in the past, there is also evidence reported elsewhere of close connections between leaders of ASSOTSI and the political elite, referred to as "clientelism" (Lindell, 2009: 1892), and ASSOTSI now appears to have an influential role at the local level, including acting as gatekeeper to members who wish to obtain pitches in markets (Director B, OTM, 2009). It has also been able to secure additional land for markets, determine the amount charged per metre for market vendors, obtain the extension of opening hours for 27 informal sector markets within Maputo from 7 pm to 9 pm, and obtain a five year mandate for representation in local government (President of ASSOTSI, 2009). At the same time, local government has sought assistance from ASSOTSI, such as seeking their help in removing traders from the front of the new stadium in Maputo (Director B, OTM, 2009).

A further possible constraint on the future legitimacy of ASSOTSI is, however, related to its representation of only black Mozambicans. Questions posed to leaders of ASSOTSI about membership of ASSOTSI, and more specifically, the proportion of members who were white or Indian, was met with laughter:

We do not meet members who are white and Indian. The largest part of this class are in the formal sector. But there are some people who do not pay [fees] in the formal market. They recruit other people...The owner of the shop gives goods to people who can sell things (President, ASSOTSI, 2009).

The lack of representation of wider groups therefore seems to be due to attitudes of non-black Mozambicans, rather than due to discrimination on the part of ASSOTSI. However, further exploration of this might be useful in future research.

Possibly the most important threat is a potential split within ASSOTSI between operators (owners or self-employed workers) and workers (those “employed” informally). The OTM have considered the idea of separating ASSOTSI into two parts: a workers’ organization and an employers’ organization, and setting up a new informal sector union. The owners would be able to join the employers’ association, but would not be entitled to be part of the new union. This separation would, however, be difficult as it is not always easy to distinguish between employers, paid workers, and workers who are unpaid family members (Director B, OTM, 2009). This casts some possible doubt on the long term future of the “partnership.” However, mutual benefits remain. According to ASSOTSI, “If the government wants to do something against the informal sector, OTM and other unions are in their protection” (President, ASSOTSI, 2009), while from the OTM perspective, “[ASSOTSI] don’t want to leave OTM as they recognize that they support them, for example through conferences, and the premises that they are using belongs to OTM” (Director A, OTM, 2005).

## Concluding Discussion

Trade unions face difficult challenges against the background of a global restructuring of work that has led to more precarious work arrangements (Webster, 2004) and a rising proportion of work in the informal economy (Jütting and Laiglesia, 2009). Within Africa, colonialism, conflict, restructuring and privatization have all contributed toward the decline in stable work (Willems *et al.*, 2006; Wood and Brewster, 2007; Lindell, 2008). The strategies undertaken by trade unions to address these challenges include alliances with community organizations (Frege and Kelly, 2003).

Union engagement with the informal economy in Africa has included extending the remit of traditional unions, setting up unions specifically to address the concerns of informal sector workers, and working with organizations representing the informal economy – either through close relationships or through an affiliate model (Andrae and Beckman, 2010; Croucher, 2007; Gallin, 2001; Lindell, 2008, 2009). However, tensions have emerged over the longer term in such relationships (Adu-Amankwa, 1999; Willems *et al.*, 2006; Croucher, 2007).

This article explored “community unionism” in Mozambique, and investigated the degree to which potential tensions highlighted in the literature were apparent in practice. Firstly, is union engagement with community organizations a central strategic objective or characterized by a piecemeal and tentative approach? In Mozambique, the OTM federation has sought to extend membership and influence through a range of strategies including influencing

government policy, engaging with international organizations, and embracing broad concerns. In the latter respect, the union federation, the OTM, set up ASSOTSI, an organization representing the informal sector, as a full-blown affiliate, and engagement with this organization still seems to be a central feature of its plans, evidenced by continued support in terms of resources, training, lobbying, and assistance in linkages with international organizations. However, are there mutual benefits for the trade union and the community organization? It appears that the relationship is symbiotic, with both sides benefitting, rather than parasitic, with one side exploiting the other for its own advantage. OTM provides ASSOTSI with resources, while in the context of the huge proportion of work in the informal economy, ASSOTSI provides OTM with legitimacy. However, there are some doubts regarding the relationship's sustainability in the longer term. Firstly, ASSOTSI represents those working illegally, while the OTM focuses on workers in formal employment. Secondly, OTM has a close relationship with the government due to its socialist past, yet ASSOTSI has a more tentative relationship with the government. Thirdly, ASSOTSI represents only African workers. Furthermore, senior figures in the OTM now seem to be reconsidering the value of sustaining an affiliate model that includes all of the informal economy (including both owners and workers), and are instead contemplating setting up a union to represent informal sector workers. Thus, the relationship might be somewhat unstable in the longer term.

The broader challenge is arguably to understand "when, how and why" emerging strategies of community unionism can "successfully rebuild worker voice and representation" (Tattersall, 2009: 181). In Mozambique, as in other countries, it is arguably only by representing both formal and informal sector workers that unions can achieve representation of the whole workforce (Gallin, 2001). Moreover, by working in partnership with informal sector organizations they might potentially have more impact on national government. However, evidence from other countries such as Ghana suggests that unions (and also, associations representing the informal economy) can be seen as agents of government, and regarded as a system of control for the powerful rather than a voice for the weak (Croucher, 2007). In order to achieve a positive impact for vulnerable workers, unions might therefore need to continually re-evaluate their strategies for representing the informal sector, and at the same time proactively lobby local and national governments for the creation of "decent jobs" in both the formal and informal sector.

## Notes

- 1 In this article, we follow the International Labour Organization definition of the “informal economy” which includes both categories of work, and takes informal jobs to be those where the employment relationship is not covered in law or in practice by national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits (ILO, 2010).
- 2 This figure includes agricultural work. The inclusion of agricultural work in this figure is a matter of some debate, but is beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, it should be noted that informal work often merges with unemployment – summary statistics can hide this reality.

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## SUMMARY

### Community Unionism in Africa: The Case of Mozambique

Against the background of liberalization, privatization and financial crisis, unions face a declining number of core members. In emerging economies such as Mozambique, the formal sector now constitutes around eight percent of the working population, while around seventy-five per cent of the workforce is in the informal sector, with the remainder being unemployed. In many countries, unions have sought to engage these workers through "community unionism."

This article draws on in-depth research to investigate how community unionism has been employed in Mozambique, an emerging economy in Africa. In doing so, it asks whether engagement with community organizations is characterized by a

strategic or piecemeal approach, the degree to which there are mutual benefits for the trade union and the community organization, and whether the relationship is sustainable in the longer term.

Analysis of findings suggests that community unionism is vibrant within Mozambique. Trade union engagement with the main community organization representing the informal economy appears to be a key element of its revitalization strategy; both parties are benefiting from the relationship, and it appears to be sustainable. However, certain questions arise regarding its longer-term viability. Firstly, ASSOTSI represents those working illegally, while the OTM focuses on workers in formal employment. Secondly, OTM has a close relationship with the government due to its socialist past, yet ASSOTSI has a more tentative relationship with the government. Thirdly, ASSOTSI represents only African workers. Furthermore, senior figures in the OTM now seem to be re-considering the value of sustaining an affiliate model that includes all of the informal economy (including both owners and workers), and instead are contemplating setting up a union to represent informal sector workers.

KEYWORDS: Africa, trade union, informal economy

## RÉSUMÉ

### Le syndicalisme communautaire en Afrique : le cas du Mozambique

Dans un contexte de libéralisation, de privatisation et de crise financière, les syndicats subissent un déclin dans le nombre de leurs membres. Dans les économies émergentes, telle celle du Mozambique, le secteur formel ne représente que 8 % de la main-d'œuvre, alors qu'environ 75 % des travailleurs se retrouvent dans le secteur informel, les autres étant sans emploi. Dans plusieurs pays, les syndicats ont cherché à impliquer ces travailleurs du secteur informel dans le syndicalisme communautaire.

Cet article se fonde sur une recherche en profondeur que nous avons effectuée sur la façon dont le syndicalisme communautaire s'est exprimé dans cette économie émergente d'Afrique. Plus particulièrement, nous avons cherché à répondre aux questions suivantes : l'engagement avec les organisations communautaires est-il caractérisé par une approche stratégique ou à la pièce ? À quel niveau y a-t-il bénéfices mutuels pour le syndicat et l'organisation communautaire ? Cette relation est-elle viable à long terme ?

L'analyse des résultats nous indique que le syndicalisme communautaire est bien vivant au Mozambique. L'engagement syndical avec la principale organisation communautaire représentant l'économie informelle (ASSOTSI) semble être l'élément clé de cette stratégie de revitalisation. Les deux parties bénéficient de cette relation qui semble viable. Il y a cependant certaines questions eu égard à cette viabilité à long terme. D'abord l'ASSOTSI représente les travailleurs illégaux

alors que l'organisation syndicale OTM regroupe les travailleurs de l'économie officielle. Ensuite, l'OTM a une relation proche avec le gouvernement vu son passé socialiste alors que l'ASSOTSI a une relation plus fragile avec ce même gouvernement. Finalement, l'ASSOTSI ne représente que des travailleurs africains. Des représentants seniors de l'OTM semblent se questionner sur la pertinence de soutenir un modèle qui inclut toute l'économie informelle (propriétaires et travailleurs). L'OTM envisage plutôt de mettre sur pied un syndicat pour représenter les travailleurs du secteur informel.

MOTS CLÉS : Afrique, syndicat, économie informelle

## RESUMEN

### Sindicalismo comunitario en África: El caso de Mozambique

Con un trasfondo de liberalización, privatización y crisis financiera, los sindicatos enfrentan un deterioro de la cantidad de sus miembros del núcleo central. En las economías emergentes como Mozambique, el sector formal constituye ahora cerca del ocho por ciento de la población de trabajadores, mientras que cerca del sesenta y cinco por ciento de la fuerza laboral se encuentra en el sector informal, y que el resto está constituido de desempleados. En muchos países, los sindicatos han intentado reclutar estos trabajadores mediante el "sindicalismo comunitario".

Basándose en una investigación en profundidad, este artículo estudia cómo el sindicalismo comunitario ha sido empleado en Mozambique, una economía emergente del África. Con ello, se pregunta si la implicación con las organizaciones comunitarias está caracterizada por un enfoque estratégico o fragmentado, a qué nivel existen beneficios mutuos para el sindicato y la organización comunitaria, y si la relación es sostenible a largo plazo.

El análisis de los resultados sugiere que el sindicalismo comunitario es vibrante en Mozambique. La implicación sindical con la principal organización comunitaria representante de la economía informal parece ser el elemento clave de su estrategia de revitalización; ambas partes benefician de esta relación, y esto parece ser sustentable. Sin embargo, se plantean ciertas cuestiones respecto a su viabilidad a largo plazo. En primer lugar, ASSOTSI representa aquellos que trabajan ilegalmente mientras que la OTM se centra en los trabajadores del empleo informal. En segundo lugar, la OTM tiene una relación estrecha con el gobierno debido a su pasado socialista, pero la ASSOTSI tiene una relación más vacilante con el gobierno. En tercer lugar, la ASSOTSI representa solo los trabajadores africanos. Más aún, las figuras mayores de la OTM parecen actualmente estar reconsiderando la importancia de sustentar un modelo de afiliación que incluya toda la economía informal (incluyendo propietarios y trabajadores) y, en cambio, estarían proyectando la organización de un sindicato para representar los trabajadores del sector informal.

PALABRAS CLAVES: África, sindicato, economía informal